



# The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

## Instruments to foster long-term paternal involvement in family work

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# Parental Allowance Plus and Partnership Bonus: Instruments to Foster Long-term Paternal Involvement in Family Work in Germany

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## 1. Parental Allowance Plus and the Partnership Bonus: Expression of a Paradigm Shift in German Family Policy

### 1.1. A Brief Genesis

No less than a paradigm shift has taken place in German family policy during the last years (Clemens 2009; Ostner 2010). The new policy instruments have turned away from the male bread winner model and aim at an equal distribution of work and family responsibility within the household (Fleckenstein 2011; Blum 2012).<sup>1</sup> Reconciling work and family life has thus been at the centre of major reforms throughout the last years. In 2007, the basic parental allowance (*Elterngeld*) was introduced, offering parents an income-related benefit for the first 12+2 months after a child is born.<sup>2</sup> When introducing the parental allowance, the federal government aimed at three major objectives. First, the benefit should reduce the economic risk of having a child by ensuring more financial stability. Young families usually face a loss in income as one partner – mostly the mother – stays at home in order to care for the new born child. Parental allowance replaces the missing income to some extent and softens the economic disadvantages.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, the government aimed at supporting the long-term economic independence of both parents. Boosting the female employment rate by setting incentives for mothers to return to the labour market soon after giving birth was the second major objective. Thirdly, the income related character of the benefit was also meant to motivate fathers to stay at home and take over a part of the care work at an early stage (Deutscher Bundestag 2006).

In 2008, the federal government put in place another pillar of its new family policy. The new Childcare Funding Act (*Kinderförderungsgesetz*) guarantees a childcare place to every child aged one. The reform constituted a major shift away from a family policy traditionally dominated by financial benefits towards more investment in public infrastructure for families (Leitner 2010).

In 2014, the parental allowance plus (PAP) and the partnership bonus were introduced. Both instruments build upon the basic parental allowance and allow for

<sup>1</sup> However, some contradictory policy instruments, e.g. tax splitting, still persist (see chapter 4).

<sup>2</sup> The Swedish parental leave model served German policy-makers as best practice.

<sup>3</sup> The justification of the bill linked the economic disadvantages with the question of childlessness, thereby generating a demographic argument for the parental allowance. The question of how to motivate well-educated women to get more children temporarily dominated the public debate around the reform.

more flexibility. Above all, parents are encouraged to combine part-time work and parental allowance benefits. The reform had two major aims: first, encouraging mothers (once more) to return to work soon. Secondly, the paternal involvement in childcare had a prominent place in the debate. The equal sharing of work and family responsibility on a partnership base<sup>4</sup> has evolved as new guiding principle of German family policy. Mothers and fathers are encouraged to share paid and unpaid work and should both have the opportunity to combine paid employment and unpaid care work. Three aspects are frequently discussed with regard to so-called 'active' fathers: first, their own desire to spend more time with their family. Secondly, their role in supporting mothers' careers by taking over family tasks and thirdly, the advantages of active fatherhood for early childhood development.

## 1.2. Challenges and Priorities addressed

A majority of parents with young children wish to equally share family-responsibility and labour market participation. Surveys show that a growing number of fathers would like to spend more time with their family while many mothers would like to increase their working-hours. In Germany, 60% of the parents with children younger than three years say that the ideal solution would be that both partners engage equally in family tasks and the labour market (DIW 2013). However, only few parents of young children live according to this model as they experience conflicts with prevailing conditions. Consequently, surveys reflect that parents demand support in order to reconcile family and work.<sup>5</sup> The German Government has addressed this situation by introducing a new approach to the reconciliation of work and family life (see above).

Parental allowance plus and the partnership bonus address the time after the birth of a child – a period that has been found to be important with regard to the subsequent division of paid and unpaid work within the household (Bühlmann et al. 2010; Grunow et al. 2012). With transition to parenthood, many couples experience an increasing amount of care work for the first time in their relationship. This often means that an earlier life model in which both partners were employed in roughly the same proportion is no longer the obvious solution. One important aspect of that change is that mostly women take time off after the birth of a child. This temporary role – the mother shouldering the bulk of the family and care work while the father is still gainfully employed – often consolidates the distribution of work within the family (Grunow 2014). The gender-based division of work within the household which results after the birth of the first child is therefore a critical factor at a critical period – but it also offers an opportunity to set a long-term pattern for an equal division of employment and care work (Gärtner 2012). Recent studies show that father-specific leave positively impacts upon a gender-equal division of work and has a favourable impact on care and family work in the long-term (Hook 2010; Li et al. 2015). Parental allowance plus and the partnership bonus address this situation by allowing parents to have more flexibility and by rewarding an equal distribution of paid and unpaid work at an early stage of their parenthood.

<sup>4</sup> The German term is *Partnerschaftlichkeit*.

<sup>5</sup> 61% of parents think that politics should improve conditions allowing for both parents being gainfully employed (Forsa 2014).

## 2. How does it work? Explaining Parental Allowance Plus (PAP) and Partnership Bonus

Reconciling work and family life has two dimensions: more time for the family and more time for gainful employment. Accordingly, the German family policy aiming at a good work-life balance for young parents is built on two pillars. One pillar consists of the **parental allowance**, **parental allowance plus** and **partnership bonus**. These instruments allow working parents to spend more time with their children while compensating a part of the loss in income. All three instruments are related to **parental leave**. The second pillar consists of the provision of **institutional childcare** as this provides the necessary infrastructure that allows parents to work.

In the following, all five policy instruments are described in more detail. As the PAP and partnership bonus build on the basic parental allowance, it is necessary to include a description of the latter here. Furthermore, some information on the reforms and expansion of childcare is given as this can be understood as a complimentary approach.

Since 2014, parents can either choose between basic parental allowance and PAP or combine them. All three types of benefits are funded by the federal government, through general taxation.

### 2.1. Basic Parental Allowance (since 2007)

Parents can distribute 14 months of basic parental allowance among themselves. One partner can take a maximum of 12 months. Two additional months are paid, if both parents take at least two months (12+2). Single parents are entitled to 14 months. Maternity leave benefit is paid for eight weeks after birth and counts as basic parental allowance. Thus, parents cannot distribute these two months between themselves. In general, the parental allowance replaces the loss in income by 65% of the average net income during the twelve months before birth. This also applies for self-employed (see 2.4.1.). The minimum monthly amount is € 300. Parents who were not gainfully employed before birth are entitled to the minimum amount, as well. The maximum amount is € 1,800. Low-income parents benefit from a higher compensation rate. For parents with an average net income below € 1,240, the replacement rate increases up to 67%. If the net income before birth was lower than € 1,000, the replacement rate increases up to 100%, with an additional 0.1% more for every two Euros less income. E. g. when the net income during the twelve months before births was on average € 992, the replacement rate is accordingly 67.4%.

*Example:*

Emma was born on 5 May 2018. Emma's mother, Ms. Fischer, wants to stay at home for one year. She takes 12 months of basic parental allowance. Mr. Fischer decides to request two months of basic parental allowance. He stays at home the first month after the birth together with his wife. When Emma turns one, she is entitled to a place at a childcare centre. Ms. Fischer returns to work and Mr. Fischer uses his second month of basic parental allowance to accompany his daughter during her first weeks at the kindergarten. During the twelve months before Emma was born, Ms. Fischer had an average monthly net income of € 1,700. Mr. Fischer's net income was € 2,100. Thus, Ms. Fischer receives  $€ 1,700 \times 0.65 = € 1,105$  basic parental allowance per month. Mr. Fischer's monthly allowance amounts to  $€ 2,100 \times 0.65 = € 1,365$ .

Mr. and Ms. Fischer's neighbours, Mr. and Ms. Eckert, are also having a baby soon. They decide for the same model as their neighbours. However, Ms. Eckert has a lower net income. Her average net income only amounts to € 940 per months. Her basic parental allowance will thus be  $€ 940 \times 0.7 = € 658$ .

Months	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Mother													
Father													

Maternity leave benefit counted as basic parental allowance

**Basic parental allowance**

## 2.2. PAP (since 2015)

Parental allowance plus is aimed at supporting parents who plan to return to their jobs shortly after their child was born. They can have a wage from part-time work and receive PAP at the same time. Parents are allowed to work a maximum of 30 hours per week while receiving PAP.

With PAP parents can extend their entitlement period: 1 parental allowance month becomes 2 PAP months. Thus, parents can receive PAP twice as long as Basic parental allowance. PAP, like basic parental allowance, replaces income loss by at least 65% and up to 100%. The maximum amount is half of the total monthly parental allowance for which parents without part-time income would be entitled, with a minimum amount of € 150 and a maximum of € 900. Single parents benefit in the same way as mothers and fathers with different living arrangements. The idea behind PAP was to promote part-time employment at an early age of the child. Before, parents faced economic disincentives for part-time work as they would have lost money from the state. Parents who do not work are also entitled to PAP. They simply receive half of the basic allowance. Unlike basic parental allowance, parents can receive PAP after the 14<sup>th</sup> months of the child. However, one parent must receive PAP without interruptions from the 15<sup>th</sup> months onwards, so that the other parent is entitled to PAP after the 15<sup>th</sup> months as well.

Self-employed parents profit from the flexibility that PAP offers them. If they work part-time or in case they have lagging payments for services they rendered before the birth of their child, they may receive a higher allowance with PAP than they would according to the Basic parental allowance. In addition, they can receive PAP for twice as long as they could receive the basic parental allowance.

*Example:*

Ms. and Mr. Schulz decide on the following option: Ms. Schulz takes six months of basic parental allowance. Afterwards, she and her husband decide to work part-time. They decide to use PAP. Therefore, Mr. Schulz claims 10 months of PAP and Ms. Schulz the remaining 6 months.

Months	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	12	14	15	16
Mother																
Father																

Maternity leave benefit counted as basic parental allowance

**Basic parental allowance**

**PAP**

Mr. Schulz's net income amounts to € 1,900. During his PAP months, he reduces his work and earns only € 1,000. Thus, he is entitled to € 585 PAP ( $1,900 - 1,000 = 900$ ;  $900 \times 0.65 = 585$ ). € 585 is less than half of the amount of basic parental allowance and thus below the limit ( $1,900 \times 0.65 = 1,235$ ;  $€ 1,235/2 = € 617.5$ ).

### 2.3. Partnership Bonus (since 2015)

The partnership bonus is an additional incentive for mothers and fathers to equally share paid and unpaid work within the household. If mothers and fathers both decide to work part-time simultaneously – for 4 months in parallel and between 25 to 30 hours per week – they will both receive PAP for four additional months. In this way, families remain financially secure for longer time when holding down a part-time job and are better able to divide tasks within the family. Partnership bonus months can only be taken for four consecutive months. Furthermore, the additional partnership bonus months need to be taken directly after the parental allowance or PAP. It is not possible to interrupt the receipt.

*Example:*

Mr. and Ms. Müller decided to make use of the full potential of the different options. Ms. Müller stayed at home with her little son for the first nine months. Mr. Müller accompanied them during the first month after birth. Thus, when their son was nine months old, they had already used 10 months of basic parental allowance. During the two following months Ms. Müller worked 15 hours per week and received PAP. Her husband continued to work full-time but took some holidays when Ms. Müller went to work. When their son was 11 months old, they swapped the roles and Mr. Müller stayed at home for three months receiving basic parental allowance while Ms. Müller worked fulltime. Their son started early childhood education and care (ECEC) when he was 13 months old. From the 14<sup>th</sup> month onwards, Mr. and Ms. Müller both worked 25 hours per week and were thus entitled to the partnership bonus of 4 extra months of PAP.

Months	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Mother																		
Father																		

Maternity leave benefit counted as basic parental allowance

**Basic parental allowance**

**PAP**

**Partnership bonus (PAP)**



## 2.4. Further Specifications

### 2.4.1. Eligibility Requirements and Extra Benefits

Parental allowance and parental allowance plus are paid to employees, civil servants, self-employed or unemployed parents, to students and apprentices, to couples as well as single parents and parents who are separated but share the parental responsibility. Equally entitled are adoptive parents and foster parents as well as same-sex couples. Parents need to live in the same household with the child. When parents are ill, disabled or dead, other persons who take over the care can use the leave and receive the benefits. Non-eligible are parents who work more than 30 hours per week and parents with an annual net income exceeding € 500,000 or € 250,000 in case of single parents.

However, eligibility for the partnership bonus is more restricted as both partners need to be employed and both need to work in a corridor between 25 and 30 hours. Couples in which one partner is e.g. unemployed or a student, cannot opt for the partnership bonus.

Parents with several small children are entitled to a supplementary payment: If there are two children under the age of three years, or three or more children under the age of six years in the household, the benefit is increased by 10% (at least € 75 per child or € 37.50 for PAP). In case of multiple births, a supplementary benefit of € 300 per month is paid per additional child.

### 2.4.2. Dissemination Strategies

Dissemination strategies include a variety of leaflets and publications on PAP and the partnership bonus. Furthermore, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth runs the website [www.familienportal.de](http://www.familienportal.de) (family forum) which provides an overview of different benefits for families as well as information on counselling and support offers. The information tool [www.infotool-familie.de](http://www.infotool-familie.de) allows parents to explore interactively to which benefits they are entitled. Furthermore a digital assistant is planned in order to support parents with their parental allowance claims. Additionally, a telephone hotline provides assistance and counselling on all questions around parental leave and allowances. Counselling is furthermore provided by the local parental allowance Service Points.

## 2.5. Parental Leave

Parents are entitled to three years of parental leave. Parental leave is an individual entitlement and cannot be transferred. Since 2014, 24 months can be taken up to the child's eighth birthday. Parental leave provides parents with employment protection rights. Parents who claim basic parental allowance, PAP or partnership bonus usually apply for parental leave during this period. Parents need to inform their employers seven weeks in advance. Employers cannot reject parental leave requests. The parent who is the main caregiver receives pension credits for childrearing time.

## 2.6. Expansion of Institutional Childcare

Since August 2013, every child between the age of one to school entry has had the legal right to early childhood education and care (ECEC) in an ECEC centre or in family day care. Although the German states (Länder) and municipalities are primarily



responsible for providing childcare centres or family day-care, the Federal Government provides financial and qualitative support for the needs-based expansion of day care services for children younger than three years. With this support, 400,000 new places have been realised. Currently, more than 33% of children younger than three years attend ECEC. However, the demand still exceeds the supply. According to a study published by the German Economic Institute there was a lack of almost 300,000 places for children in Germany in 2017.

The federal government is currently preparing a new bill to address this situation. According to this bill, the federal government is going to invest additional € 5.5 billion in ECEC. The proposal contains several instruments supporting the states in their attempts to increase quality of childcare. These include for example eliminating child care fees for parents, expanding flexible opening hours as well as language training.

In the past, the federal government already established different programmes to ensure and improve the quality of childcare.

- With the Federal Programme "Language-Day-Care", the Federal Government has allocated 1 billion Euros between 2016 and 2020 to provide additional staff at selected day care centres assisting in the provision of speech and language tuition for children and in providing assistance to families.
- With the Federal Programme "Day-CarePlus", the Federal Government promotes extended opening hours in selected childcare centres and childminder services (2016 to 2019).
- With the Child Day Care Action Programme, the Federal Government promotes the expansion of flexible day care services which are especially tailored to meet families' needs.

As the main responsibility for ECEC lies with the states and municipalities, access and quality vary between different regions. In some states, ECEC is free of charge (e.g. Berlin); in other states, municipalities or day care centres themselves determine the costs which leads to remarkable differences for families. In the state of Schleswig-Holstein, parents spend on average 8.9% of their household income on childcare, compared to 2% in Berlin. Currently, the public debate focuses on the question of free access versus improvements in quality.

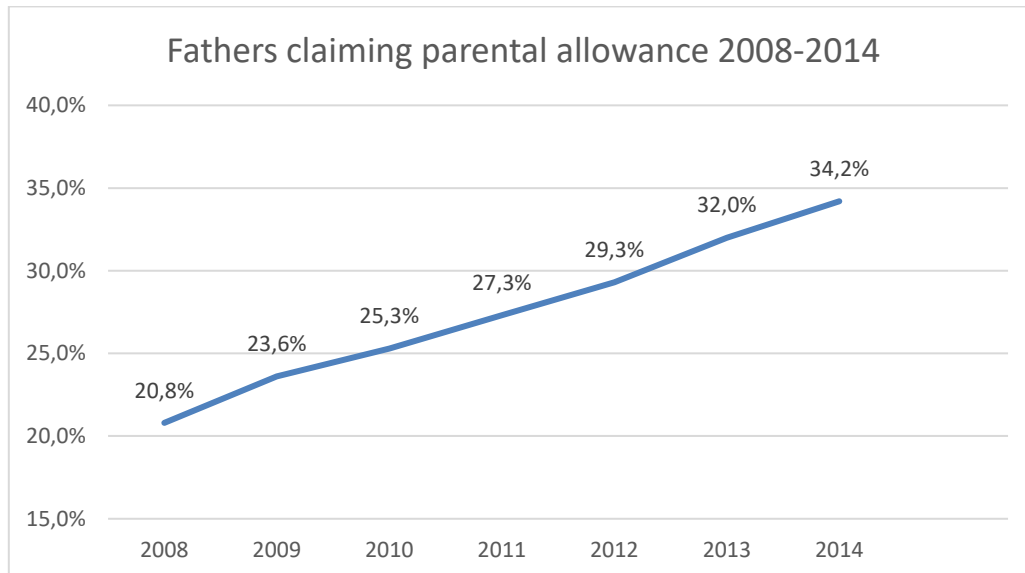
### **3. Keeping its Promises? Take-up of Parental Allowance, PAP and Bonus Months**

Parental allowance is one of the best-known family related benefits in Germany. 91% of people have heard of it and 82% of recipients agree that parental allowance is especially helpful in boosting the family income (Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 2018). With regard to the aims of the benefit two main trends can be observed. First, the number of mothers in work has risen. Secondly, more fathers take parental leave and make use of more time for the family.

In 2016, 57% of mothers with a child aged 2 were employed, compared to 41% in 2006. Furthermore, in the same group the share of mothers working near full-time (28-36 hours per week) more than doubled from 6% to 14% (ibid.). At the same time, the number of fathers claiming parental allowance raised from 20.8% of eligible fathers in 2008 to 34.2% in 2014 (see graph 1). Regionally, father's share even

reached 57% in 2014. In the same year, 95.9% of mothers opted for parental allowance in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis) 2016).

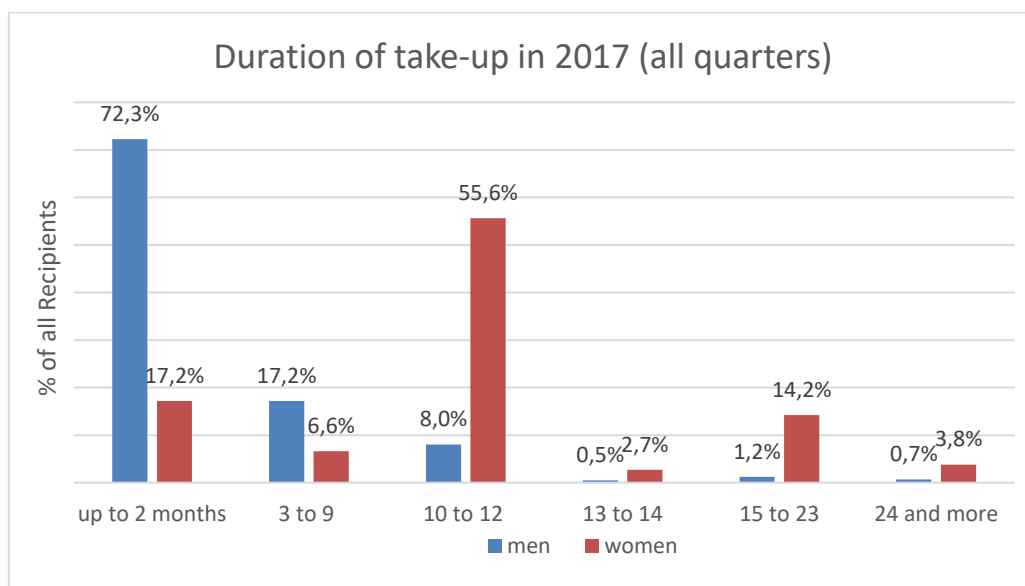
*Graph 1: Development of paternal involvement*



Source: Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis) (2016): Öffentliche Sozialleistungen. Statistik zum Elterngeld. Beendete Leistungsbezüge für im Jahr 2014 geborene Kinder. Own presentation.

However, the majority of fathers only claims the minimum period of two months whereas the majority of mothers stays at home 10 to 12 months (see graph 2). But duration of take-up develops positively as fathers tend to expand the time span in which they receive the benefit. In the first quarter of 2018, 20.7% already claimed three to nine months (Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis) 2018b).

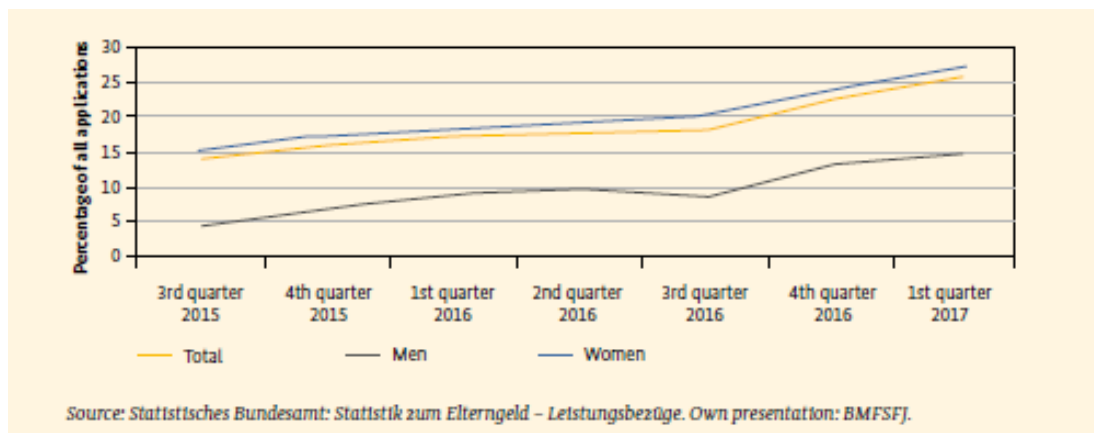
*Graph 2: Duration of Take-up*



Source: Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis) (2018a): Öffentliche Sozialleistungen. Statistik zum Elterngeld. Leistungsbezüge 2017.

Take-up of PAP has doubled since its introduction and is continuously raising. In the first quarter of 2018, 30.9% of parents opted for PAP (Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis) 2018b). Of all mothers claiming the benefit, 32.9% made use of PAP. Take-up by fathers is overall lower, but has more than tripled since its introduction. The majority of fathers on parental leave still uses basic allowance only. However, 17.9% claimed PAP in the first quarter of 2018 (ibid.).

*Graph 3: Parental Allowance Plus Applications*



Source: Graph taken from the Family Report (2018).

However, data shows that fathers who make use of PAP reduce their working hours for longer periods of time. Fathers who claimed only basic parental allowance received the benefit on average for 3.0 months compared to 8.2 months with PAP (ibid.). This is an important result with regard to paternal involvement in family work. Fathers especially appreciate the partnership bonus. From January to March 2018, as many as 29% of fathers who claimed PAP also opted for the partnership bonus compared to 3.5% of women. These figures correspond to 6,865 men and 9,662 women (ibid.).<sup>6</sup>

Fathers opt for PAP above all because the benefit allows them to spend more time with their children and support their partners with regard to care work. To spend more time with the child is also the main driver for mothers and fathers to make use of the partnership bonus. Furthermore, asked about their motivation to claim the bonus months, more than three quarters of fathers said it allowed them to equally share their responsibility for work and family life (Deutscher Bundestag, 2018).

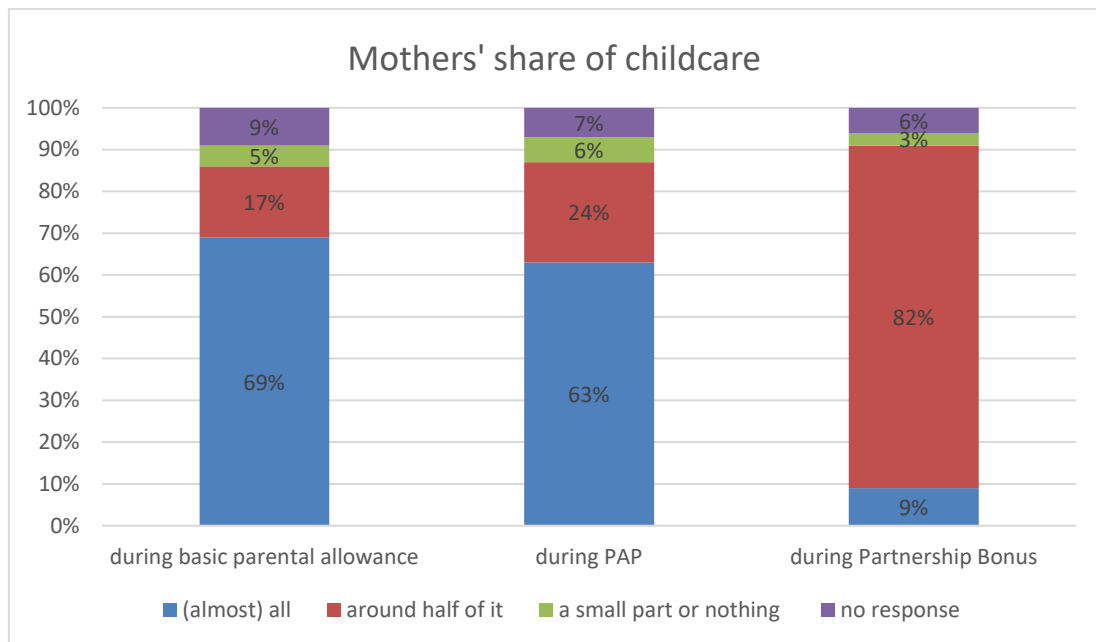
What are the effects of PAP and partnership bonus on the division of work and family duties within the housework? Only 29% of mothers are employed while receiving PAP, compared to 71% of fathers (ibid.). This figure indicates that the majority of women uses PAP in order to stay at home for longer instead of returning to work early. With regard to family responsibilities, fathers who claimed PAP frequently stressed that the benefit was helpful for them in order to spend more time with the family and allowed them to support their partner.

A striking difference appears with regard to parents that opted for the bonus months. They realize an almost equal distribution of paid work and care duties, as is shown in

<sup>6</sup> As partnership bonus months can only be taken by both partners in parallel, single parents and same sex couples probably account for the difference between the total number of women and men.

the following diagram. This also corresponds to their motivation when opting for the partnership bonus (see above). However, in total only 1.7% of all parents who claimed parental allowance made use of this option in the first three months of 2018 (Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis) 2018b).

*Graph 4: Distribution of work and family responsibility*



Source: Deutscher Bundestag (2018): Drucksache 19/400, p.14. Own presentation.

## 4. Persisting Challenges and Obstacles

The results presented above underline the potential of PAP and the bonus months with regard to fathers' uptake of parental leave and a lasting involvement in family work. Both instruments support women who want to return to their jobs soon after the birth of a child. And fathers appreciate the flexibility that allows them to be employed and spend more time with their children. However, some shortcomings can be observed with regard to these instruments:

- **High complexity**

The combination of parental allowance, parental allowance plus and the partnership bonus offers parents a variety of options to combine work and family life. Various instruments, such as the national service hotline or the website [www.elterngeldrechner.de](http://www.elterngeldrechner.de) (parental allowance calculator), aim at helping parents to make a choice that suits their situation and guides them through the jungle of possible options. However, these instruments and the related conditions stay complex and are not always easy to understand for both parents and companies. Some parents still believe that fathers are only entitled to two months of parental allowance. Many stakeholders therefore demand an expansion of counselling services, some even would like to see counselling as mandatory condition for receiving the benefit. Furthermore, the variety of different options can be challenging for employers, especially for small businesses.

- **Non-transferability**

The share of non-transferable partner months (12+2 or 24+4) is lower than in some Nordic states that are known for their good performance with regard to gender equality. As shown above, a majority of German fathers still takes only the minimum period of two months. This is important because fathers who take longer periods of parental leave are more likely to reduce their working time in the long run and take over more family tasks (Pfahl et al. 2014). Expanding the share of non-transferable partner months could thus be a way forward to increase long-term paternal involvement in family work. Furthermore, increasing the earmarked months would put more pressure on employers to develop comprehensive work-life strategies for their businesses.

- **Leave alone**

Latest research shows that parental leave has the biggest effect on long-term paternal involvement when fathers are on leave alone (Brandth/Kvande 2016b). If fathers stay at home alone with their child, they are more likely to develop the skills related to a primary caregiver, above all a 'need-oriented' care practice. In contrast, if the father takes his parental leave together with the mother, the latter usually continues to be the main caregiving person whereas the father has only a supportive role (ibid.). Consequently, reducing the amount of basic parental allowance months that can be taken from both parents simultaneously could have positive effects on long-term paternal involvement in family work. During PAP and the bonus months, this is less critical because if both parents are employed part-time the care work is usually divided more equally and fathers tend to spend time alone with their children while the mother is at work.

- **Flexibility in use**

A similar argument applies to the flexibilisation of parental leave in terms of part-time. The possibility to take part-time leave is often discussed as an incentive for fathers to take up leave. However, initial research results show that if parental leave is taken on a part-time basis, the job still dominates the day (Brandth/Kvande 2016a). Fathers find themselves torn between work and their time with the children, and the rhythm and tempo of their life are more often adapted to the working world. According to Brandth and Kvande, this prevents fathers from becoming main caregivers. Thus, part-time leave only partially changes the gendered division of care responsibility (ibid.). The long-term effects of PAP on paternal involvement in family work are thus to be seen.

- **Economic disadvantages**

All three instruments are repeatedly criticised as instruments for the upper middle class. Many families with lower incomes cannot do without the full income of both partners. This applies even more to the income of the fathers, who are usually the main earners of the household. Generally, high income parents enjoy more economic freedom to distribute paid and unpaid work on an equal partnership base, whereas low-income parents face more economic constraints in this regard. Up-take of parental leave by fathers clearly reflects these economic considerations. Fathers with higher income do more often claim parental leave than fathers with lower income (see table 1). In contrast, mothers' uptake does not considerably vary by income groups except for the highest incomes. Here, mothers claim less parental leave.

*Table 1: Take up rates of parental allowance according to net income before birth*

Sex	Total	With income before	Percentage of column 3 according to net income earned before birth of the child						
			< € 500	€ 500 – € 999	€ 1000 – € 1239	€ 1240 – € 1499	€ 1500 – € 1999	€ 2000 – € 2770	> € 2770
Male	100%	87.4%	3.4%	4.6%	5.4%	9.3%	24.7%	27.5%	25.0%
Female	100%	72.0%	11.2%	19.3%	12.6%	12.9%	21.7%	13.8%	8.4%

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis) (2018b).

Furthermore, parental leave benefits are counted as social minimum protection. Thus, parents living on social protection do not receive the benefit, which is frequently criticised for leading to increased child poverty (Zukunftsforum Familie e.V. 2017).

- **Single parents and the bonus months**

Single parents are entitled to the partnership bonus when they work between 25 and 30 hours per week, regardless of the other parent's work. However, this working time corridor is challenging to achieve for many single parents as they often lack the possibility to share their family responsibility with someone else. In order to better support this group, the minimum amount of working hours for the partnership bonus could be lowered for single parents, e.g. to 19.5 hours per week (Zukunftsforum Familie e.V. 2017).<sup>7</sup>

The above mentioned weaknesses all relate to the design of the parental allowance and the partnership bonus. However, when looking at the broader picture of German family policies, some contradictory incentives persist which have negative consequences on long-term paternal involvement in family work.

- **Pay Gap and tax splitting**

First of all, the segregation of the labour market and the persistent gender pay gap make it financially less rational for fathers to spend less time with gainful employment and get more involved in family work as reflected in table 1. As long as the fathers on average earn more than mothers, families will always face the incentive to distribute paid and unpaid work in a traditional manner (Possinger 2016). Furthermore, the German tax splitting system rewards income inequality within married couples. It thus discourages an equal distribution of family responsibility and labour market participation.

- **Investment in ECEC**

Another challenge is the accompanying infrastructure. If both parents want to be employed, access to high-quality childcare is crucial. The sharing of care and provision of childcare to support parents go hand-in-hand. Since 2013, every child between the age of one and the school entry age has had the legal entitlement to early childhood education and care (ECEC) in an ECEC centre or in family day care in Germany. However, the necessary expansion of childcare is a process that requires

<sup>7</sup> However, in a survey none of the respondents that were single parents stated that the corridor minimum of 25 hours hindered them from making use of the partnership bonus (Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach 2017: Befragung von Bezieherinnen und Beziehern des Elterngeld Plus oder Partnerschaftsbonus) .

time and lies in Germany above all within municipal responsibility (see section 2.6.). Thus, a de facto care gap exists, hindering parents from simultaneous involvement in the labour market.

- **Changes in norms and values**

As shown in section 3, fathers' share of care work has more than tripled since the introduction of the parental allowance and is still raising. It has become normal to see fathers caring for their small children while the mother is at work. However, societal norms change slowly and almost 40% of the German population still believes that women do better in caring for children than men (Bild der Frau 2013, see Possinger 2016). It thus needs more positive role models supporting an equal distribution of family-responsibility and labour market participation.

## 5. Questions for Debate

- What is the impact of dedicated/reserved/non-transferable parts of the leave for fathers on the up-take?
- What is the impact of sufficiently well paid leaves for fathers in their decision to take up the leave?
- Part-time leave options as incentives for fathers to claim leave versus negative effects of part-time leave on long-term paternal involvement. Which way to go?
- How do precarious jobs influence fathers in their decision to take parental leave? How can fathers in these jobs be encouraged to take-up leave?
- How can single parents benefit better from the existing instruments?
- How can employers be motivated to create structures that encourage fathers to make more use of existing leaves and achieve a better reconciliation of family and work?
- How to close the gap between parental leave and formal child care?
- How can a shift in norms and values be achieved? What role can legislation play?
- How can more positive male role models be generated?

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