



The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

Instruments to foster long-term paternal involvement in family work

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Paternal involvement in family work: The situation in Austria

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1. Austrian Country Context

Even though no European country can be said to have actually achieved an even sharing of duties between men and women when it comes to dividing up childcare and paid employment responsibilities, many countries are well ahead of Austria in achieving this goal. Austrian society and politics still have considerable amount of catching up to do when it comes to active male involvement in childcare.

The horizontal segregation of the labour market, the ongoing lack of childcare facilities (primarily in non-urban areas) and stereotypical gender role concepts are perpetuating the traditional division between paid employment and unpaid childcare work.

1.1. Parental leave of fathers and the rate of fathers taking childcare benefit

Parental leave for fathers was introduced in 1990, and the proportion of fathers taking it has always been low, ranging from 0.6% to 2%. Since the replacement of the parental leave benefit by the childcare benefit in 2002, only information on the number of women and men drawing childcare benefit is available, which is different from the number of persons taking up parental leave (as a parent can receive childcare benefit without taking leave) (see Rille-Pfeiffer 2017).

The monthly official statistics (cross sectional data at one point in time) on childcare benefits indicates an overall fathers' participation in childcare benefit of 19%. There are however considerable regional differences: in Vienna it was as high as 28.7%, while in Vorarlberg it was 10.4% and in Burgenland it was 9.9% (BM für Familie und Jugend 2017). The percentage of fathers is higher in those cases where parents receive childcare benefit for a shorter period and especially with the income-related childcare allowance of a duration of 14 months for both parents. In this variation the fathers' participation was 31% (see BM für Familie und Jugend 2018). A recent EU project titled "Men and Reconciliation of Work and Family: Supporting the Path to Gender Equal Distribution of Parental Leave and Working Time (2015-2017)" also revealed that men predominantly take two-month parental leave (see <https://maennerundvereinbarkeit.at>).

Also, the results of the latest "Return to Work" monitoring exercise by the Chamber of Labour for 2006-2014 revealed an overall increasing trend of men drawing childcare allowance. However, men are taking less time off work while they draw these benefits (Riesenfelder/Danzer 2017). According to the figures of Eurofound (2015) Austria wide approximately 3-4% of fathers take parental leave, while with civil servants the figure is 19% (Bundeskanzleramt 2017). This insight is backed up by a recent special analysis of the "Working Climate Index" (Schönherr 2017): while

90% of mothers with children under the age of 15 stated that they took a career break for childcare-related reasons, only 3% of fathers did the same. This analysis also reveals that reconciliation of work and family is particularly difficult to achieve in the first two years after birth. Overtime, atypical working patterns, irregular working hours as well as excessive working hours and time pressure, are cited as additional factors that create problems in relation to reconciliation of work and family. In contrast, flexitime or self-determined working hours facilitate better reconciliation of work and family.

1.2. The gender-specific division of working hours

Another aspect which is essential when it comes to the division of childcare are the gender-specific differences in parents' working hours. In 2015, the percentage of women in part-time work was at 47.8% but only 9.8% of men were in part-time employment in the same year. In comparison, the second quarter of 2015 saw approximately 33% of fathers of small children working overtime regularly (Statistik Austria 2017). Recent surveys in Austria have revealed that the majority of the population wants fathers to be more involved in childcare and working hours be distributed more equally between mothers and fathers: women wanted to do more paid work and men less, allowing the latter to have more time for the family. However, given the realities of the life of parents, there is a huge gap between those wishes and their concrete realisation in actual practice (IHS 2016).

1.3. Institutional Childcare

In Austria, several agreements on the increase of numbers of institutional childcare facilities have been reached between the provinces and the federal government since 2007. Through these agreements, provinces were obliged to increase the number of full-day childcare facilities.

According to national statistics, the proportion of children in childcare between 0 and 2 years of age has increased in recent years, and amounts to 26.1% in 2017 (compared with 11.8% in 2007). But there are large differences between the provinces ranging from 44.2% in Vienna to 14.8% in Styria. For children aged 3 to 5 years, the enrolment rate was 93.4% in 2017 with smaller differences between the provinces ranging from 97.2% in Burgenland to 87.8% in Styria (see Statistics Austria 2018).

1.4. Recent policy changes

With the reform of the childcare allowance which came into force in March 2017, a childcare allowance account ('Kinderbetreuungsgeld-Konto') was introduced, which replaced existing variations and allows more flexible use for parents. A fixed amount of EUR 12,337 and a maximum duration of parental leave of 28 months were set for one parental unit, while EUR 15,449 and a duration of up to 35 months were applied to births from 1 March 2017 onwards if both parents avail themselves of parental leave and split care work. With a ratio of at least 60:40 among parents, a so-called "partnership bonus" (Familienzeitbonus) of EUR 1,000 can be received. This is designed to achieve a higher share of men taking parental leave. The income-related childcare allowance of a 14 months-duration of for both parents still exists. Additionally, the possibility a one-month duration for fathers in the first 91 days after the birth of a child with an allowance of EUR 700 was agreed upon. The EUR 700 are subtracted from the total

amount of childcare allowance. For this leave, an agreement with the employer is needed and there is no dismissal protection. A Father living apart from mother and child cannot request this so called “Daddy Month”.¹

1.4.1. Good practices examples

- Since January 2017 a childcare allowance calculator² initiated by the Federal Ministry of Families and Youth, is available to make cash benefit differentials more transparent through it. With this online tool parents can run different models of childcare allowances to calculate their future financial situations. Additionally the amount of childcare allowance depending on the chosen model, the calculator also informs about the individual additional earning limit and family time bonus (Familienzeitbonus).
- The Federal Ministry of Health and Women recently initiated an online calculator which helps parents to calculate how equal sharing of paid work and unpaid care work between both parents plays a vital role (<https://www.gleichberechnet.gv.at>). However, the current Federal Minister for Women, Families and Youth decided that this online calculator will not be continued beyond September 2018.

2. Policy debate

The latest reform of the childcare allowance – mentioned above - is not so long ago – and at the moment no further reforms are planned. Currently there is no policy debate taking place which targets the involvement of men in child care duties. In the context of reconciliation of work and family the new amendment of the working time law which has only recently come into force might be of relevance. With this reform the possibility for 12-hour working days was introduced and it was argued by the proponents of these amendments that the new regulation would also be in favour of a better division of work and caring duties in families. In contrast, the critics of this flexibilisation of working time law argued that this new regulation could lead to longer working hours and to an even more unequal distribution of working hours between mothers and fathers.

3. Transferability aspects

The situation concerning the division of childcare-duties between women and men in Austria and Germany shows multiple similarities when it comes to the country context and the regulations of child-care arrangements. Both countries can still be classified as conservative welfare states (see Esping Anderson 1990) with similarities in the gender-specific distribution of paid and unpaid work due to the male breadwinner model (see Schratzenstaller 2014).

Reviewing the labour market situation in Austria and Germany, it is obvious that the women’s employment rate is much higher than the EU-28 average, with Austria and Germany having a women’s employment rate (20-64) of 70.2% and 73.6% in 2015, respectively, while the EU-28 average was 64.3% in the same year (Eurostat 2016). On the other hand, the increase in female employment was mainly due to the growth

¹ https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/PR/JAHR_2016/PK0674/index.shtml

² <http://www.bmfj.gv.at/dam/bmfj/KBG-Rechner/index.html#willkommen>

of part-time work and the female part-time rates in Germany and Austria are comparably high. In Esping-Anderson's (2016) work on the state of the family in the 21st century, part-time work plays an important role regarding the development of gender equality: *"It is not likely that the shift towards gender egalitarianism will be particularly powerful if the typical female role remains limited to the part-time status (46)."*

In line with the suggestions regarding the persistent challenges and obstacles that are outlined in the German discussion paper most of the stated challenges also address the situation in Austria: the high complexity of regulations, the short period of non-transferable periods of parental allowance, the important factor of leave-alone and the problems of fathers on parental leave who work part-time. The economic disadvantages of the instruments affect parents in Austria to a lesser extent than in Germany as the minimum financial support through childcare allowance is higher in Austria. Both countries show a persistently high gender pay gap (see Bergmann et al. 2018), albeit Austria has an individual taxation and therefore the mentioned negative effects of the German tax splitting system do not apply.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

In the above mentioned EU project "Men and Reconciliation of Work and Family..." a series of measures was developed which would help to support the role of men in childcare on company levels as well as on the level of the families. The most important findings relevant to the discussion of possible instruments to foster long-term paternal involvement in family work are summarized below. Due to the similarities between Austria and Germany most of these recommendations are relevant to the German context as well.

Encouragement of fathers to actually take parental leave:

- Non-transferability: The Austrian example shows that the number of non-transferable months is often taken as standard for the actual take-up. Thus the expansion of non-transferable periods could be a way forward to increase long-term paternal involvement in family work as the Icelandic example shows.
- Higher financial incentives for the "partnership" bonus in the context of childcare allowance.
- Raise awareness of, reflect on and challenge established societal ideals of what constitutes a "good" mother or a "good father" from the perspective of gender equality.

Enable all fathers to actually take paternity leave in the early weeks after the birth of children

- What is needed is the introduction of an entitlement under employment law, a legal entitlement for those working in the private sector as well as the public sector, protection laws against dismissal of fathers while on paternity leave, and higher allowances.

Father-friendly working (hour) models and parental part-time employment for fathers as well as mothers

- Discuss new models for parental part-time employment and create the general framework required – e.g. a 30:30 split (each parent works 30 hours a week) with wage top-up payments; top-up payment for those who opt for parental part-time employment (subject to a minimum number of working hours) and financial award as part of the pension scheme.
- Full-time employment is the norm for male employees and any prolonged deviation from this norm is difficult for employees and employers. In this context, it is obvious that there is a lack of information about parental part-time employment; for instance, both employers and employees are unaware that fathers and mothers are allowed to work part time simultaneously.
- Given that the legal entitlement to parental part-time employment only applies to companies with 21 employees or more, it is important to establish equality with regard to parental part-time employment so that everyone has a legally protected right to reduce their working hours for a better reconciliation of work and family.
- Higher importance is often attached to full-time work and (near full-time) part-time employment and this mentality needs to be changed. This calls for a change in thinking and a willingness on the side of companies to reorganise their systems so that men are also able to reduce their working hours, at least in certain phases. In this regard, senior managers have a particular responsibility in setting good examples by adopting models such as job sharing or top job sharing and by dealing more sensitively with the pronounced long-hours culture existing in Austria.

Anchoring reconciliation of work and family in collective bargaining agreements and employer/works council agreements:

- At both the company and sector levels, there is a lack of work-family reconciliation strategies that expressly consider fathers as well as mothers and that actively encourage more men to take parental leave and switch to parental part-time employment. Even at the collective bargaining agreement level, the issue is still not being given enough attention. For instance, although paternity leave has been incorporated into a few collective bargaining agreements, it is not always accompanied by protection against dismissal and by legal entitlement. Members of works councils have an important role to play in terms of ensuring that work-family reconciliation strategies become more firmly anchored in corporate life. They should introduce initiatives for improving work-family reconciliation that also become included in employer/works council agreements, e.g. they can ensure that work-family reconciliation issues are addressed in appraisal interviews or company nurseries are initiated.

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