



# Exchange of good practices on gender equality

## The Role of Men in Gender Equality Finland, 28-29 October 2014

### Discussion Paper - Iceland



*The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.*

*This publication is supported by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS (2007-2013).*

*This programme is implemented by the European Commission. It was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment, social affairs and equal opportunities area, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Europe 2020 Strategy goals in these fields.*

*The seven-year Programme targets all stakeholders who can help shape the development of appropriate and effective employment and social legislation and policies, across the EU-28, EFTA-EEA and EU candidate and pre-candidate countries.*

*For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/progress>*

# The Role of Men in Gender Equality in Iceland

Guðný Björk Eydal

University of Iceland, Faculty of Social Work

## Introduction

This paper is written for the seminar *The role of men in gender equality* held in Helsinki 28-29 October 2014. Iceland is an associated country along with Austria in the seminar. The reason for the choice of Iceland, as a case for best practices, was first and foremost the legislation on paid parental leave from the year 2000 that entitled both parents with equal rights to individual non-transferable paid parental leaves. The organisers were also interested in other policy measures in Iceland and, in particular, the working group on men and equality that was appointed in 2011 by the Minister of Welfare. Thus this discussion paper's emphasis is mainly on the policies on paid parental leave as well as the outcomes and crucial issues regarding the leave's implementation. The proposals of the working group on men as well as other policy measures aimed at the role of men in gender equality are mentioned briefly in the first section of the paper.

The paper is based on secondary data analysis, reports and last, but not least previous publications, by the author and other experts, on the case of the Icelandic parental leave. The author has worked for years with Ingólfur V. Gíslason Associate Professor at the Department of Sociology at the University of Iceland in researching the policy of the parental leave and this paper draws upon our previous results. Thus, thanks to Gíslason, other participants in our projects and the funders of our research, RANNÍS (The Icelandic Research Council), the Equality Fund and the University of Iceland Research Fund are in order. Also thanks to Þóra Kristín Þórsdóttir for helpful comments on both language and content.

## 1. The main elements of the good practice: Paid parental leave

### 1.1. Background and the general policy context

Iceland is a member of the Nordic family of nations but the Icelandic welfare system has, despite sharing the aims of the Nordic welfare states, deviated from the Nordic model in some respects. The benefit system has been characterised by fixed benefits rather than income replacement and the social security system has involved more income-testing than in the other Nordic welfare states. The structure of the welfare services is quite similar to the other Nordic countries e.g. both education and health care services are publicly funded but the scope of social services has been less in Iceland. Furthermore, in comparison to the other Nordic countries, Iceland's expenditure figures on welfare and health has been relatively low although the gap has narrowed somewhat in recent years. During the 1990s, Iceland's proportion of GNP spent on welfare and health hovered around 18-19%, but in 2002 it surpassed

the 20% for welfare expenditures (Broddadóttir et al. 1997; Ólafsson 1999; NOSOSKO, 2003).

Icelandic family policy has historically been fragmented in nature and the concept of family policy was hardly referred to in public debates until the 1990s when it gained political attention (Eydal, 2005). In 1994, the UN's Year of the Family, a proposition was put forth in Alþingi (the Icelandic parliament) that called for a comprehensive family policy and in 1997 Alþingi formally passed a parliamentary resolution on family policy. The policy was based on three principles: 1) The welfare of the family is based upon equality between men and women and on shared responsibility for the tasks within it; 2) The family is the setting for emotional ties; and 3) family life provides individuals, especially children, with security and the opportunity to fully develop their qualities. Thus, the issue of the reconciliation of work and family life gained wide attention from policymakers, labour unions and employers from the 1990s onwards (Eydal and Gíslason, 2013).

One of the main characteristics of the Icelandic society is the high labour market participation of both men and women and in 2013 84.2% of men and 78.6% of women were active in the labour market (Statistic Iceland, n.d.). The labour market is highly gender segregated (Stefánsson, 2012). Men worked on average 44 hours a week in the year 2013, while the average for women was 35.1 hours pr. week. The working hours for men has slowly been decreasing (Statistics Iceland, n.d.). The gender pay gap is still to be closed and in 2013 women had 81.1% of men's total employment income (Statistics Iceland, n.d.). However in 2013 a Plan of Action on Gender Equality Regarding Wages was introduced, aimed at decreasing the gender pay gap considerably before 2016 (Velferðarráðuneyti, 2013a). In order to be able to give a good picture of the labour market situation of parents annual statistics about their labour market participation would be needed, but such data has been collected but not yet published by the Statistics Iceland (due to lack of resources).

Since the early 1990s the availability of both pre-school, usually attended by children from the age of two and until they start elementary school, as well as after school services for children from six to nine years old has increased (Eydal and Gíslason, 2013; Pálsdóttir, 2009). In 2012 31.7% of all children younger than 2 years were enrolled in primary schools, 94,7% of two year old and between 95-96% of children age three to five (Landshagir, 2013).

The legislation on paid parental leave was revised in 2000 and provided parents with increased support. A full leave for a single child is nine months but usually children do get placement in preschool at the age of two. Thus there remains a gap between the paid parental leave and the pre-school which families need to bridge themselves. Parents use various ways to do this, e.g. family day-care that is usually subsidised by the municipalities, ask relatives and friends to help out and/or work irregular hours. Part time work is also more common among mothers than fathers (Eydal, 2008; Farstad, 2012; Ingólfssdóttir, 2013). The system of family benefits consists of child benefits that are income tested and additional benefits for lone parents (Kristjánsson, 2011). Both the system of family benefits and the system of advanced maintenance have been criticised for not taking into account the needs of support of the parents that do not share residency with their children (Eydal and Friðriksdóttir, 2012).

The first Gender Equality Act came into force in 1976 and the current Act is from 2008. The aim of the current act *"is to establish and maintain equal status and equal opportunities for women and men, and thus promote gender equality in all spheres*

*of society. All individuals shall have equal opportunities to benefit from their own enterprise and to develop their skills irrespective of gender”* (Jafnréttisstofa, 2012 p. 5). A section on work-life balance has been included in Icelandic equality acts since 2000 and in the 2008 Act it is stated that employers shall enable women and men to reconcile family life and work life. (Jafnréttisstofa, 2012).

In 2008, Iceland was hit hard by the economic crisis and the ruling government of the Independence Party (right of the centre) and Social Democratic Alliance was forced to resign after months of public protests. The government that came into power was a coalition of the Social Democratic Alliance and the Left Green Movement led by a female Prime Minister Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir. The government appointed a special working group whose role was to monitor and evaluate the impact of the crisis from a gender perspective and to “ensure that gender equality principles will be reflected in the initiatives taken to restore the economy” (Jafnréttisstofa, 2012, p. 8).

The government appointed a special Welfare Watch whose role was “...to monitor systematically the social and financial consequences of the economic situation for families and individuals in Iceland and to propose measures to help households” (Velferðarráðuneyti, n.d.). The Welfare Watch consists of representatives from all relevant social partners, interest groups, local authorities, institutions and government ministries. One of the goals of the Welfare Watch was “always to consider the gender equality viewpoint and to analyse the effects of action/inaction on both sexes” (Velferðarráðuneyti, n.d.). The working group on gender equality mentioned above was integrated into the Welfare Watch (Jafnréttisstofa, 2012).

One of the aims of the Action Plan on Gender Equality from 2011 was to appoint a Working group on engaging men in gender equality. The group was comprised of men only and delivered its proposals in 2013. Among the fifteen proposals of the group two addressed the paid parental leave and made two main suggestions: That it was important to ensure that the cap on full benefits was high enough to make it affordable to fathers to use their entitlements and that it should be made mandatory for fathers to take parental leave during the first two weeks after the birth to ensure children’s access to both their fathers and mothers (Velferðarráðuneyti, 2013).

In 2013 the Minister of Social Affairs and Housing appointed a committee to revise the family policy. The committee was asked to emphasise among other things how families with children can reconcile care of their children and labour market participation (Velferðarráðuneyti, n.d.-a).

## **1.2. The goals and target groups of the legislation on parental leave**

Iceland was the last of the Nordic countries to pass a law on universal entitlements to paid parental leave in 1981, when the law on three months paid parental leave was enacted. Mothers could resign up to one month of the total period to the father of the child. Gradually the leave period was extended to 6 months in 1991. During the 1990s there were several Member bills presented in the Icelandic Parliament Alþingi suggesting independent rights of fathers to paid parental leave but they were not fully discussed, thus no voting took place. In December 1997, Alþingi voted in favour of a bill, mandating a two-week paternity leave for all fathers as of January 1st 1998. With the amendment, all Icelandic fathers gained the right to a two week

long paternity leave, which could be taken at any time during the first eight weeks after the birth or the arrival of the child at home (Eydal and Gíslason, 2008).

In 2000 a coalition of the Independence Party and the Progressive Party (a centre party) presented a bill on paid parental leave. The bill was prepared in a close cooperation and with the support from the LMP. The twofold aim of the law as presented in its first article was: *“to ensure that children enjoy the care of both parents<sup>1</sup> and to enable both women and men to co-ordinate family life and work outside the home”* (Act on Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave no. 95/2000).

In order to ensure these goals were reached, each parent was given an independent right to a maternity/paternity leave of up to three months for the birth, primary adoption or permanent fostering of a child. This right could not be assigned to others. Additionally, a joint three months could be divided as the parents themselves chose. The mother has to take a maternity leave for no less than two weeks after the birth of her child, but otherwise the parents can use their rights during the child's first year and a half. All parents are entitled to paid parental leave regardless of their gender and whether or not they hold custody/or share residency with their children - as long as they are in an agreement with the other parent about the arrangements (visiting rights).

### 1.3. Implementation: Legal and financial provisions

#### 1.3.1. Legal provisions

The law came into force in 2001, but the non-transferable rights were gradually implemented; i.e. fathers had the right to a one-month paternity leave in 2001, two months in 2002 and in 2003 they gained the full entitlement of three months (Act on Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave no. 95/2000).

The leave could be taken during the first 18 months after the birth but the employee had to negotiate with the employer if he- or she wanted to divide the leave into a number of shorter spells (Eydal and Gíslason, 2008).

Furthermore the law emphasised pregnancy protection and employers were obligated to alter the work conditions or working hours of a pregnant woman, a new mother or a breast-feeding woman, if her safety and health could be at risk - without penalising the woman by wage cuts (Act no. 95/2000; Eydal and Gíslason, 2008).

As discussed in next section (1.3) the cap of the benefit amount was cut three times during the aftermath of the 2008 crisis. In addition it was also agreed to extend the period during which parents can take their parental leave from the birth of the child to the age of 18 months to the age of three years (36 months) (Eydal and Gíslason, 2013-a). The period was however changed from birth to the age of two (24 months) in December 2012.

In December 2012, bill that suggested that each parent should be entitled to five months non-transferable leave and then the couple should have two months to divide between them, thus 5+5+2 was accepted unanimously. In December 2013 a bill that abolished the extension of the leave period was proposed and accepted, but

---

<sup>1</sup> Originally it said both mother and father but this was later changed to both parents in line with revision of all law in respect of legal rights of same sex parents.

ways to finance an extension of the leave period are being discussed (Lög um ýmsar forsendur frumvarps til fjárlaga fyrir árið 2014 (verðlagsbreytingar o.fl.). nr. 140/ 2013). In September 2014 the Minister of Housing and Social Affairs announced that she would appoint a committee to make proposals on how to proceed with the development of the paid parental leave and whether it was more important to extend the leave or raise the cap of the payment. Thus in September 2014 it is not fully clear what steps will be taken regarding the extension of the leave period.

In December 2012 amendments were made concerning the entitlements of parents that are the only parent of a child e.g. when a person adopts a child or undergoes article insemination. In such cases the parent in question can become entitled to a nine month long leave. If there is another parent this is not possible, thus parents that do not live together cannot transfer their rights (Eydal and Gíslason, 2013).

### **1.3.2. Financial provisions**

In 2000 the leave payments were changed from a system of low flat rate benefits to 80% salary while on leave, although parents who are not employed still get paid a fixed minimum compensation. In 2004, changes were made to the laws, which placed a cap on the amount of money received during parental leave (Eydal and Gíslason, 2008). This was feared to influence the take up but since the cap was relatively high, only 2.6% of fathers and 0.4% of mothers had incomes above the cap while working (Arnalds et al., 2013).

Severe cuts had to be made in the welfare system following the crisis that shook Icelandic society in October 2008 and this applied in particular to the payments in parental leave. The ceiling on payments was lowered three times from December 2008 to December 2009 from 480,000 ISK (approx. 3,100 EUR) in 2008 to 300,000 ISK (approx. 1,940 EUR) in 2009 (Eydal and Gíslason, 2013). This resulted in a change of the percentage of fathers that had incomes above the cap from 6% in 1997 to 47% of the fathers in 2012 (compared to 21.2% of the mothers) (Fæðingarorlofssjóður, n.d.).

In December 2012, Alþingi revised the law on paid parental leave and started the correction of the cuts to economic compensation and in December 2013 the cap was raised again to 370,000 ISK (approx. 2,400 EUR) (Lög um ýmsar forsendur frumvarps til fjárlaga fyrir árið 2014 (verðlagsbreytingar o.fl.). nr. 140/ 2013).

## **1.4. Institutional arrangements and procedures of implementation**

A specific fund was set up to finance the payments for maternity/paternity leave. The fund was financed with a part of the employers' insurance levy. (Fæðingarorlofssjóður, n.d.) Payments to parents outside the labour market are financed by the government. Due to a fall in applicants and the lower cap there has been a decrease in expenses of the fund, from 2010 to 2012 by 2,363,000 ISK (approx. 15,300 EUR). To put that amount into context the total amount paid to parents in 2012 was 7,905,000 ISK (approx. 51,180 EUR) (to 12,789 parents, thereof 5,797 fathers). (Vinnumálastofnun, n.d.). According to the governmental budget for 2014 the fund had quite a big surplus and in 2013 the insurance levy paid

by the employers to the fund was cut from 1.28% to 0.65%, thus the income of the fund was lowered considerably (Lög um tekjuaðgerðir frumvarps til fjárlaga fyrir árið 2014 (tekjuskattur einstaklinga, virðisaukaskattur, launatengd gjöld og skattar á fjármálafyrirtæki) nr. 139/2013). Both the *Confederation of Icelandic Employers (SA)* and *The Icelandic Confederation of Labour (ASI)* declared their dissatisfaction with this change that was nevertheless implemented (Fréttablaðið, 20. nóvember 2013).

## **2. Results of the good practice and its impact on achieving gender equality**

### **2.1. Key results in relation to the baseline situation and to the goals and target groups**

#### **2.1.1 Take up**

The first most important result of implementing a parental leave scheme was that the parents, and fathers in particular, would make use of their entitlements. In 2001 82% of fathers made use of their rights to one month and their proportion has remained around 86% - 88% for most years from 2003-2007 (see table 1 below). It also soon became obvious that fathers mainly use the days that are assigned to them specifically. When they had one month in 2001 they used on average 39 days. This became 68 days when they had two months and 97 when the third month was added in 2003. From 2003 to 2007 the number of days increased to 100. Mothers, on the other hand, used on average their three months plus the three sharable months, averaging above 180 days. As Arnalds, Eydal and Ingólfsson (2013) point out this is no surprise keeping in mind the trends have been observed in other countries with individual non-transferable rights to parental leave (Duvander and Lammi-Taskula, 2011; Moss, 2014). The statistics also show that there was a slow, but steady increase in the number of fathers that used some of the sharable time from 14.5% in 2001 to 21.2% in 2007. Arnalds et al (2013, p. 328) come to the conclusion that “the statistics show Icelandic fathers embracing this new opportunity and generally making use of their entitlements. This certainly indicates an increased sharing of care amongst parents. However, it is naturally important to note that mothers take the lion’s share of leave and it is also known that many mothers extend their leave for up to a year with a similar reduction in ratio to compensation.”



**Table 1.** Take up of paid parental leave 2001-2007

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Mothers (n)	4,054	4,070	4,167	4,291	4,302	4,417	4,555
Applications of fathers as % of applications of mothers	82.4%	83.6%	86.6%	89.8%	88.2%	88.6%	88.5%
Average number of days taken by fathers	39	68	97	96	99	99	101
Average number of days taken by mothers	186	187	183	182	184	185	181
% of fathers that take more than three months	14.5%	13.9%	16.1%	17.1%	19.5%	19.7%	21.2%
% of mothers that take more than three months	94.2%	93.4%	90.9%	90.5%	89.7%	90.3%	93.1%
% of fathers that do take less than three months	5.1%	10.1%	14.2%	17.9%	19.5%	18.5%	16.4%
% of mothers that do take less than three months	0.9%	0.8%	1.0%	1.1%	0.1%	0.3%	1.5%
% of fathers that do take all leave in one spell	45.2%	21.2%	17.9%	15.0%	25.8%	25.7%	25.7%

(Source: Fæðingarorlofssjóður, n.d.).

Table 2 shows the development of take up from 2006-2013. During the aftermath of the 2008 crisis a higher proportion of fathers applied for paid parental leave but used fewer days. There is also a decrease in the number of days used by mothers but not as big as among the fathers. This change is obviously in contrast with the goals of the law and while there can be many factors that contribute to this change the cut in the cap is usually mentioned as the main explanatory factor.

**Table 2.** Paid parental leave\*, mothers and fathers 2006-2013

Year	Applications of fathers as % of mothers	Average number of days taken by fathers	Average number of days taken by mothers	Days taken by fathers as % of days taken by mothers
2006	88.6	100	186	53.5
2007	88.5	100	181	55.8
2008	90.9	102	178	57.8
2009	96.6	99	178	55.1
2010	95.3	92	179	51.4
2011*	92.2	87	179	48.0
2012*	89.6	82	179	44.1
2013*	-	74	180	39.1

\*Of parents in labour market before birth.

\*Numbers for 2012 and 2013 are preliminary

(Source: Fæðingarorlofssjóður, n.d.).

The Birth Leave Fund has published data about the number of days taken by fathers by income (table 3) that shows that the change in number of days is lowest among the fathers with the highest income. The number for 2012 and 2013 are still preliminary due to the three-year period that parents were given to use their entitlements when the law was changed in 2009. However, by comparing the number of days from 2008 to 2011 we see that the number of days is only stable in the highest income group.

**Table 3.** Number of days in paid parental leave by of fathers income level

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012*	2013*
<100.000.	94	86	94	80	90	81
100-200.000	97	93	89	88	86	81
200-300.000	100	100	94	90	84	80
300-400.000	102	100	95	90	86	77
400-500.000	103	101	89	86	81	77
500-750.000	111	99	88	80	73	64
750.-1.000.000	107	97	87	89	70	65
1.000.000+	92	91	92	91	85	77

\* The figures for 2012 and 2013 are still preliminary  
(Source: Fæðingarorlofssjóður, n.d.).

As pointed out above it is important to note that the take up is not the same among all groups of fathers and the biggest differences is to be found among fathers who do not live with the mother of their children (lone fathers, divorced etc.) compared to fathers that do share residency with their children (Eydal, 2008; Arnalds et al., 2013).

Despite the decrease in take up during the aftermath of the crisis it should be mentioned that Icelandic fathers still take the highest proportion of the total number of days in the Nordic countries as following table 4 shows (NOSOSKO, 2012).

**Table 4.** Nordic countries, number of days with daily cash benefits in connection with pregnancy, childbirth and adoption, % of total number of all leave days\* taken by men, 2000-2012

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
2000	5.5	4.1	3.3	7.2	13.7
2001	5.7	4.3	11.5	8.3	15.0
2002	5.5	4.8	19.6	8.6	16.6
2003	5.1	5.3	27.6	8.6	18.3
2004	5.5	5.7	31.8	9.0	19.7
2006	6.0	5.7	32.6	10.4	20.9
2009	7.3	6.7	33.9	11.6	23.1
2010	7.1	7.1	31.7	14.7	23.9
2011	7.4	8.3	29.0	17.8	24.5
2012	7.4	8.7	28.4	19.8	25.1

(Source: NOSOSKO, 2001-2012)

Table 4 also shows clearly how the usage of the Icelandic fathers increased during the period from 2001 when the first month of non-transferable rights was enacted to 2003 when all three months were in place.

### 2.1.2. Ensuring child care from both parents?

As pointed out above, one of the two main objectives of the 2000 Act on paid parental leave was to ensure that children would receive care from both parents. As previously discussed, Icelandic fathers have been using their non-transferable share of the parental leave and are taking longer leaves than fathers in the other Nordic countries. But how are parents dividing the childcare? The author et al. conducted a survey among parents which included questions on the division of childcare (both

day and night) during the first three years of parenthood. The survey has now been conducted three times among parents of children born in 1997, 2003 and 2009 (Arnalds et al. 2013). One of the aims of the study was to learn if taking parental leave had any effect on the division of care between the parents. This was possible by comparing the parents that enjoyed the paid parental leave from 2000 with those who did not enjoy such rights (the baseline). As table five shows the response rate has been acceptable.

**Table 5.** Methodological information on the surveys collected among parents of all first-borns in 1997, 2003 and 2009.

Round	2001	2007-2008	2013
Data collection method	Mail survey	Mail and web survey	Web survey
Characteristics of the population	Parents of all children born in 1997 who were their mother's firstborn	Parents of all children born in 2003 who were their mother's firstborn	Parents of all children born in 2009 who were their mother's firstborn
Size of population	1,551	1,572	1,929
Number of respondents	890	874	1,218
Response rate	57%	56%	63%

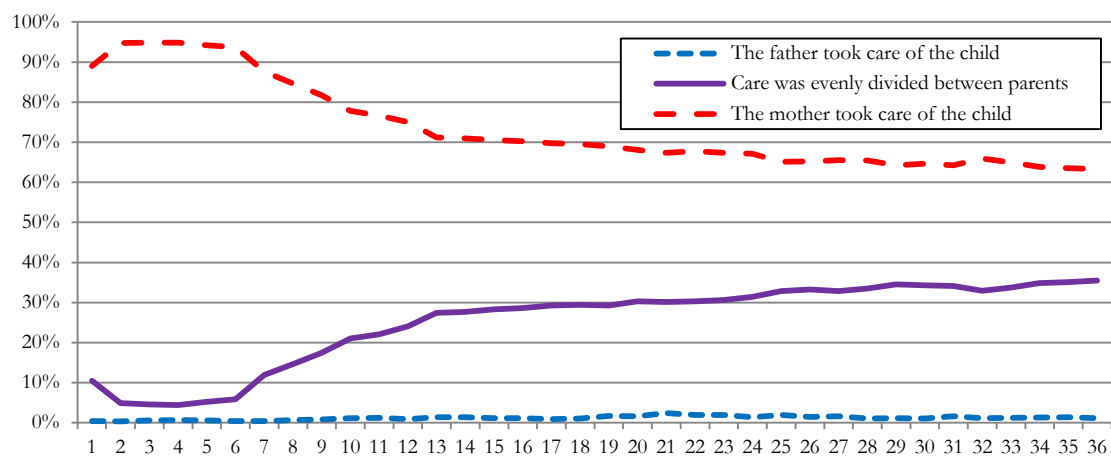
(Source: Arnalds et al., 2013).

Respondents, mothers and fathers of all first born children in the respective years, were asked how care was divided between the parents at night and during the day for each month from the time the child was born and until it was three years old. There were five answer options: 1) The mother cared completely for the child, 2) The mother cared mostly for the child, 3) Care was equally divided between parents, 4) The father cared mostly for the child, and 5) The father cared completely for the child<sup>2</sup>. In figures below, the answer options of cared mostly and cared completely are combined. The results are shown for daytime but for results about night-time care please see Arnalds et al., 2013.

Figure 1 shows the results for parents of children born in 1997 that did live together (cohabiting or married). For this group, where the fathers were not entitled to any individual rights to paid parental leave, during the first month the mother was the main care-taker in 89% of cases (n=879) and care was equally divided between parents in little over 10% of cases. The proportion of parents who divided care equally fell after the first month but then rose gradually after the age of six months. During the second year, 29% of the parents reported having divided the care equally and 34% had done so in the third year. The proportion of fathers who were the primary caretaker ranged from 0.3% to 2.4%.

<sup>2</sup> In the questionere same sex parents were asked about the care of both parents.

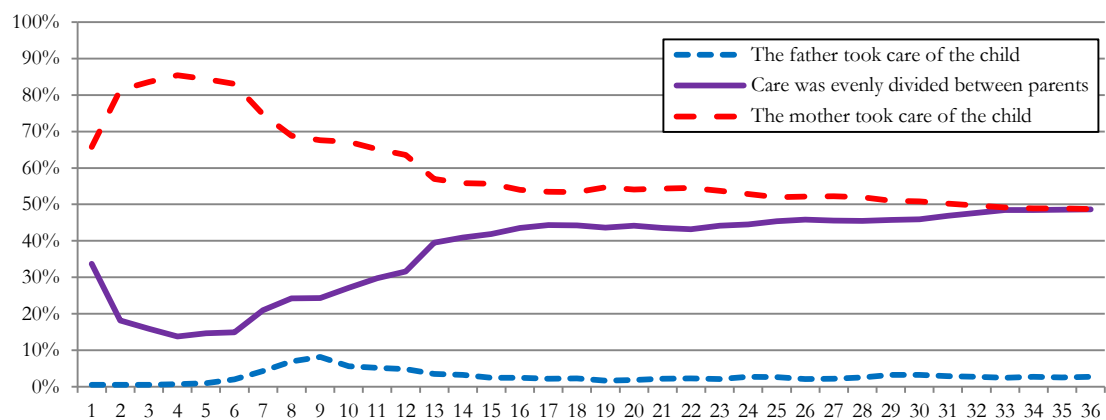
**Figure 1.** How did parents of firstborns in 1997 divide care during the day from birth till the age of three?



(Source: Arnalds et al., 2013).

In 2003 the stepwise lengthening of the parental leave decided in the Act of 2000 had been completed. By comparing the division of care among the parents of the children born in 2003 to the parents of the children born in 1997 the change is clear. As Figure 2 shows clearly the children born in 2003 received more care from their fathers than those born in 1997. The division is shared equally during the first month of the child's life in 34% of cases, and then the proportion falls as also happened in the case of the children born in 1997. As in the former survey the proportion of children that are cared for evenly by both parents starts to rise after the age of six months and from month 33 the proportion of children receiving care from both parents becomes equal to the proportion receiving care primarily from their mother. Even though the proportion of children that receive care mainly or only from their fathers has increased compared to the children born in 1997 (ranges from 4.3% and 8.1%) it is still the lowest proportion.

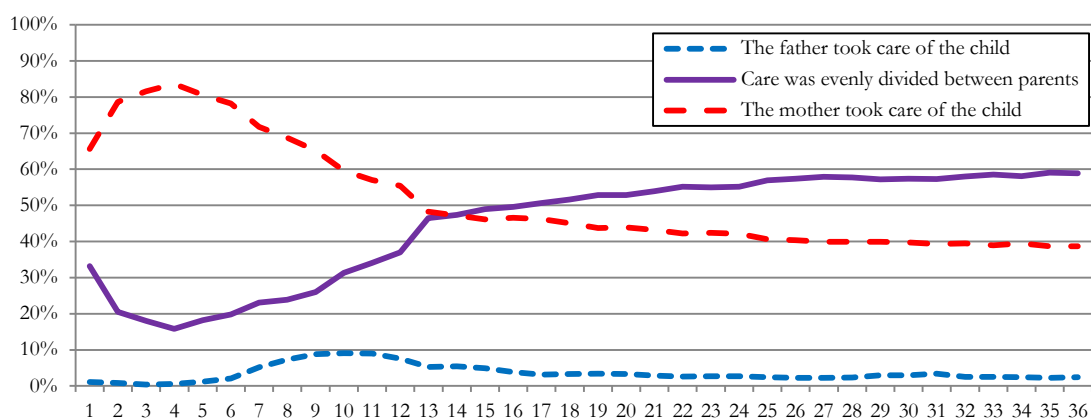
**Figure 2.** How did parents of firstborns in 2003 divide care during the day from birth till the age of three?



(Source: Arnalds et al., 2013).

The trend of increase in equal sharing of childcare continues in the last survey and by the time the children born in 2009 had reached 15 months, they were more likely to receive equal care from both parents than to get care primarily from the mother. At the age of three 59% of the children born in 2009 were cared for equally by their mother and father, while the same held true for 49% of children born in 2003 and 36% for children born in 1997. Furthermore, 9% of 8, 9 and 10 month old children born in 2009 were cared for primarily by their fathers, which is a considerable increase from the earlier surveys.

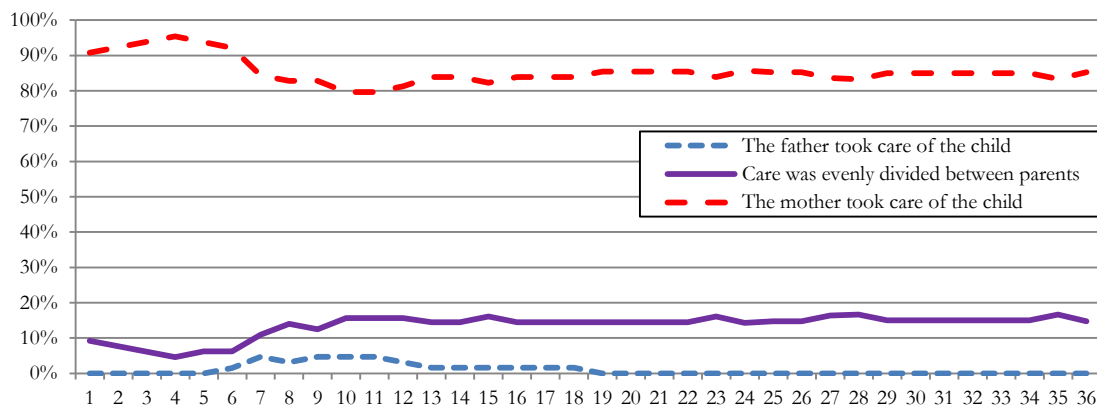
**Figure 3.** How did parents of firstborns in 2009 divide care during the day from birth till the age of three?



(Source: Arnalds et al., 2013)

Thus these results show that more parents shared childcare equally in the later surveys. This is in line with one of the two declared aims of the law, to ensure children care from both parents. At the same time it is clear that even among parents that do live together the mothers still play a larger role in care than do the fathers. The larger role of mothers is however more pronounced in cases when the children do not live with both parents, as is shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 4.** How did parents of firstborns in 2009, that did not live together, divide care during the day from birth till the age of three?



(Source: Arnalds et al. 2013).

Figure 4 shows that the opportunities of fathers to care for their children are to a large extent still dependant on the type of relationship they have with the mother. In cases when parents do not live together fathers take much less part in childcare. These results are in line with previous research and indicate a need for increased family counselling for lone parents (Eydal and Ragnarsdóttir, 2008).

While it can not be claimed that the change in the division of the care among parents is only due to the paid parental leave there were no other policy changes taking place during the period from 1997 to 2003 that could explain the increase in fathers increase in care of their children. Thus while it is impossible to isolate the effect of paid parental leave it is believed to be the main driving factor concerning changed care practices among Icelandic parents in the early 2000s. Furthermore research from other countries also shows similar results of increase in paternal care after the implementation of father's quotas. One such example is Rege and Solli (2010) who based their analyses on the effects of the father's quota in Norway on diaries from the Norwegian Time Use Surveys. They found that fathers spent significantly more time with their children after the policy was implemented in 1993.

### **2.1.3. Equal rights to earn and care**

The surveys among parents of first borns in 1997 and 2003, mentioned in section 1.3.1. show that the gender gap regarding both the number of parents in work and working hours is smaller after the implementation of the law. Both surveys showed that pregnancy had substantial effects on the participation of mothers in paid labour. The former survey showed that 76.4% of mothers (n=887) and 83.7% of fathers (n=820) were engaged in paid labour a year before birth. The proportion of mothers who worked declined gradually till the time of birth. The employment rates of both parents prior to childbirth were quite similar in the latter survey.

The surveys also reveal an almost identical pattern for employment rates of mothers after childbirth. Very few mothers work during the first three months following childbirth (1% in the former survey and 2% in the latter). Very few mothers of children born in 1997 had returned to work 6 months after childbirth (7%) but the proportion rose rapidly after that and had reached 62% fifteen months after the child was born. The proportions were similar for mothers of children born in 2003.

A little under 64% of fathers of children born in 1997 worked during the first month after childbirth (n=820) but the proportion had returned to its pre-birth level already during the second month after the child was born (or about 83%). On average some 77% of the fathers were working during the first three months following childbirth. In the latter survey there are considerable changes among fathers relative to the first survey. The proportion of fathers who are employed fell from 84% to 31% between the surveys. Three months after the child was born the proportion had risen back to 68% and rises gradually thereafter. One year after childbirth the proportion was up to 84%, i.e. the pre-birth level (Eydal, 2008).

Similar development has taken place regarding the parents working hours. It has been a general trend in the labour market that the gap between mothers and fathers working hours has gradually been decreasing but the development has been faster among the parents (Eydal, 2008; Arnalds, et al., 2013). As mentioned in the introduction there is a need for labour market statistics that do provide information for parents not only men and women. There is also a growing need for research on

how the rights to paid parental leave has been received and social powers at play in the work places

Attitude surveys show strong support to the scheme also among employers (Eydal and Gíslason, 2014/forthcoming). The long-term effects of more equal participation of parents in care of their children on gendered attitudes and behaviour in the labour market has probably not fully come into power.

## **2.2. Challenges, obstacles and constraints encountered**

The high percentage of fathers who use their entitlements shows that the non-transferable right is the key to enable fathers to take parental leave. The joint entitlements have only been used by small groups of fathers- thus the joint rights are interpreted as the rights of the mother. This is in line with the experiences in other countries (Moss, 2013). Furthermore our research shows that it is important to provide more family counselling for parents that do not live together since the take up rates of lone fathers are considerably lower than fathers that live with the mother of their child.

The cap of full benefits is also an important issue in these regards, if it is cut too much then it can negatively influence the number of fathers who apply for leave as well as the length of the leave they take.

The main challenges that parents meet is the gap between paid parental leave and pre-school, and if one parent has to cut down on paid work it is more often the mother that does it, thus the father takes more often on the role of breadwinner during that period.

## **3. Assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the legislation and its implementation**

The strength of the legislation is the equal rights of both parents. The implementation was made gradually, therefore one month was added to the non-transferable rights of fathers during the period 2001-2003. Furthermore, the fact that the months that fathers received were added to the scheme seems to have contributed to the wide support that this legislation received from all political parties, organisations of employers, unions and the general public.

The implementation took place without any kind of PR for the scheme, but in hindsight more attention should have been paid to providing family counselling to parents that do not live with their child, since the take up is lowest among the fathers that do not share residency with the mother of their child (lone fathers).

There is a lack of information on the obstacles that parents have possibly met in the labour market, but as the statistics show there do not seem to have been any serious hindrances during the first years. This might however have changed during the aftermath of the crisis due to rising unemployment and increased precariousness in the labour market.

The most noted weakness of the legislation is how short the total leave period is, in comparison with the other Nordic countries that all have extended their leave to at least one year. The fact that the leave is not longer (nor is there any cash for care schemes) and that preschool is in most cases only available for children from the age of two, leaves parents with a gap that they have to bridge. There has been a clear political will for extending the leave period to 12 months and such a law passed with no MP voting against in Alþingi in December 2012. However, this extension was abolished a year later and the matter is still unresolved. The care gap is not only a logistic problem for all parents of babies to solve, but it also works as a reinforcer of the gendered division of labour, since it is usually the mothers who extend their leave or work part-time in order to care for children (Eydal, 2008; Farstad, 2012; Ingólfssdóttir, 2013)

The decrease of the cap of the amount also revealed that fathers are not able to take paid parental leave if it means that the income of the home is decreased too much; this has affected the take up in negative manner.

#### **4. Main questions and issues for debate at the meeting**

- What lessons can be learned from the Icelandic model?
- To what extent were men involved in designing the system of parental leave?
- How should fathers be empowered to take paid parental leave?
- Should fathers be obligated to take certain number of weeks after the birth of the child (like mothers are)?
- How important is the length of the period that fathers can use to take their leave months (has been ranging from 18 months to three years in the case of Iceland)?
- The Icelandic law allows parents to decide for themselves how to use their entitlements, e.g. they can be on leave simultaneously or take many short spells if their employer accepts the arrangements. What are advantages and disadvantages of various options? How does it impact on the father/child relationship?
- How can the up-take of paternity leave for fathers that are facing obstacles e.g. fathers that are not in relationship with the mother of their child, be increased?
- How can the gap in the take-up of parental leave, depending on the socio-economic status of families, can be decreased?
- How gender equality plans contributed to the outcomes of the solution? What other measures improved / could improve the outcomes?



## References

Act on Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave no. 95/2000.

Arnalds, Á., Eydal, G.B. and Gíslason, I.V. (2013). Equal rights to paid parental leave and caring fathers- the case of Iceland. *Stjórnmal og stjórnsýsla*, 9, 323-344. DOI:<http://dx.doi.org/10.13177/irpa.a.2013.9.2.4>

Broddadottir, I., Eydal, G.B., Hrafnisdottir, S. and Sigurdardottir, S.H. (1997). The development of local authority social services in Iceland. In Jorma Sipilä (ed.), *Social Care Services the Key to the Scandinavian Welfare Model*, pp. 51-76. Aldershot: Avebury.

Duvander, A. Z. and Lammi-Taskula, J. (2011). Parental Leave. In I. Gíslason and G. B. Eydal (eds.) *Parental leave, childcare and gender equality in the Nordic countries*, Tema Nord 2011:562 (pp. 29-82). Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers.

Eydal, G.B. (2005). *Family Policy in Iceland 1944-1984*. Göteborg: Göteborgs Universitet.

Eydal, G.B. and Friðriksdóttir, H. (2012). Child maintenance policies in Iceland- Caring mothers and breadwinning fathers? *European Journal of Social Security*, 14(4), 267-285.

Eydal, G. B. (2008). Policies promoting care from both parents - the case of Iceland. In G. B. Eydal and I. V. Gíslason (eds.), *Equal Rights to Earn and Care – Parental Leave in Iceland* (pp. 111-148). Reykjavík: Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands.

Eydal G. B. and Gíslason I. V. (2008). Paid parental leave in Iceland – history and context. In G. B. Eydal and I. V. Gíslason (eds.), *Equal Rights to Earn and Care – Parental Leave in Iceland* (pp. 15-44). Reykjavík: Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands.

Eydal, G.B. and Gíslason, I.V. (2013a). Iceland 2012-Revised law on paid parental leave. Retrieved from [www.thjodmalastofnun.is](http://www.thjodmalastofnun.is).

Eydal, G. B. and Gíslason, I.V. (2013). Icelandic family policies. In M. Robila (Ed). *Family Policies across the Globe*, (pp. 104-129). New York New York: Springer.

Eydal and Gíslason (Forthcoming/2014). Caring fathers and parental leave in prosperous times and times of crisis: the case of Iceland. In Eydal, G. B. & Rostgaard, T. (eds.). *Caring Fathers in the Nordic Welfare States -Policies and Practices of Contemporary Fatherhoods* (pp. 327-348). Policy Press.

Eydal, G. B. and Ragnarsdóttir, R. S. (2008). *Hvernig haga einstæðir foreldrar fæðingarlofi* [How do lone parents organise their paid parental leave, working paper]. Reykjavík: Þjóðmálastofnun.

Fæðingarorlofssjóður (n.d.). Unpublished data from the Parental Leave Fund.

Félags- og tryggingamálaráðuneyti. (2009). *Aðgerðaáætlun ríkisstjórnarinnar í velferðarmálum* [The governmental action plan on welfare]. Reykjavík: Félags- og tryggingamálaráðuneyti.

Fréttablaðið. (2013, 20 November). Fjárlög skerða tekjustofninn.

Farstad, G. (2012). Når omsorgsgapet skal dekkes: Islandskes foreldres kjønnede omsorgsstrategier. *Nordisk Børnehaveforskning*, 5, 5, 1-11.

Ingólfssdóttir, E. (2013). *Det löser sig. En studie om hur isländska föräldrar överbygger omsorgsgapet mellan föräldradeltidighet och förskola*. Unpublished MA thesis. Lunds universitet. Sociologiska institutionen.

Jafnréttisstofa. (2012). *Gender Equality in Iceland*. Akureyri: Center for Gender Equality.

Landshagir. (2013). Reykjavík: Statistics Iceland.

Lög um ýmsar forsendur frumvarps til fjárlaga fyrir árið 2014 (verðlagsbreytingar o.fl.). nr. 140/ 2013.

Lög um tekjuaðgerðir frumvarps til fjárlaga fyrir árið 2014 (tekjuskattur einstaklings, virðisaukaskattur, launatengd gjöld, skattar á fjármálafyrirstæki) nr. 1397/2013.

NOSOSKO. (2003). *Social Protection in the Nordic Countries*. Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers.

Moss, P. (Ed). (2013). *International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research*. Retrieved from: [http://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/Leavenetwork/Annual\\_reviews/2013\\_complete.6june.pdf](http://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/Leavenetwork/Annual_reviews/2013_complete.6june.pdf)

Kristjánsson, A.S. (2011). *Fjölskyldubætur á Íslandi*. Reykjavík: Þjóðmálastofnun.

Ólafsson, S. (1999). *Íslenska leiðin*. Reykjavík: Tryggingastofnun Ríkisins.

Rege, M. and Solli, I. F. (2010). *The impact of paternity leave on long-term father involvement*. Stavanger: University of Stavanger.

*Statistics Iceland*. (e.d.). Various data retrieved from [www.hagstofa.is](http://www.hagstofa.is).

Stefánsson, K. (2012). Umfang vinnunar í lífi Íslendinga 1991-2008. [Local social services]. In G.B.Eydal and S. Ólafsson (eds.), *Þróun velferðarinnar 1988-2012*, (pp. 89-106). Reykjavík: Félagsvísindastofnun.

Vinnumálastofnun (e.d.). *Ársskýrsla 2012*. [http://www.vinnumalastofnun.is/files/arsskyrsla%20vefur\\_1809023816.pdf](http://www.vinnumalastofnun.is/files/arsskyrsla%20vefur_1809023816.pdf)

Velferðaráðuneyti. (e.d.). The welfare watch. Report to Alþingi. Retrieved from [http://eng.velferðarraduneyti.is/media/velferðarvakt09/29042010The-Welfare-Watch\\_Report-to-the-Althingi.pdf](http://eng.velferðarraduneyti.is/media/velferðarvakt09/29042010The-Welfare-Watch_Report-to-the-Althingi.pdf)

Velferðarráðuneyti. (2013). *Karlar og jafnrétti. Skýrsla og tillögur um aukinn hlut karla í jafnréttismálum*. Reykjavík: Velferðarráðuneyti.

Velferðarráðuneyti. (2013a). *Plan of action on gender equality regarding wages*. Reykjavík: Velferðarráðuneyti.