



Exchange of good practices on gender equality

The role of men in
gender equality
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Comments Paper - Poland

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The Role of Men in Gender Equality – Comment Paper

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1. Introduction

1.1. Role of public policy towards men's involvement in gender equality

In Poland the problem of gender equality is identified mostly with so called “women’s issues”, therefore actions taken by policy makers and NGO’s are concentrated generally on advancing women in public life and engaging them in the labour market to a higher extent [only 57.6% of women 20-65 are active on the labour market according to Eurostat, 2013]. However, in Poland the unpaid work of women is very common and becomes an important part of economy. The unpaid work in the household applies both for women who are not active on the labour market and those who perform professional jobs. The culture of man as a breadwinner and women as a primary carer is still very much rooted in the Polish society. Therefore right now most actions taken by government in order to advance gender equality are focused on enhancing higher proportions of men taking care of children and performing household duties. The new law on parental leave was introduced in 2013 and will be presented in the next part of the comment paper.

In Poland there is no specific department or working group in public administration which would be devoted to men and gender equality. Moreover, there is no specific public body devoted to men’s issues at all. The Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment is an office inside the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, yet it does not have a separate budget, which limits its operational capacities. Furthermore, it focuses mainly on the women’s issues and question of men is presented only within the fatherhood role and family issues, such as combating domestic violence.

1.1.1. Paternity leave and men’s involvement in childcare

The issue of father’s involvement in childcare and household duties is analysed mostly from the perspective of very low birth rate in Poland. We have 1.2 fertility rate [Eurostat, 2014], which is far below replacement fertility rate (around 2.1). At the moment, most efforts taken by the government in terms of family policy are concentrated on changing this demographically disturbing trend. Therefore in 2013 a significant reform of Labour Code was introduced, which prolonged the maternity leave for 2 weeks and created a new concept in Polish family policy – parental leave which can last up to 26 weeks and can be divided between father and mother at parents’ discretion. Overall, since mid-2013 Polish families are entitled to one year of leave connected to birth which is divided into several parts:

- 14 weeks of mandatory maternity leave - women cannot resign from taking it or share it with father of the child;
- 6 additional weeks of basic maternity leave – women can resign from using this six weeks, if the father will take it;
- 6 weeks of additional maternity leave – can be taken at once or in two rounds by both parents;
- 26 weeks – can be taken consecutively in one, two or three rounds which are not shorter than 8 weeks. Parents may share it respectively to their needs including using two shares parallel and being together on paternity leave. Parents can also combine childcare with professional life and work half-time.

The entanglement of the nomenclature of all kinds of leaves is criticized by experts and NGOs and should be unified after the revision of the Bill, which according to the reform will take place 1,5 year after the introduction, namely at the beginning of 2015.

According to public opinion polls, women in Poland would like to have more than one child, but they do not decide to give birth for the second time due to overload of household duties and problems with reconciliation of work and family life. [CBOS, 2011]. Polish women also more frequently expect support in their motherhood from parents (49%), friends and neighbours (48%), than husband/partner (33%) [CBOS, 2013]. This statistics show urgent need to involve men to greater extent in childcare. Therefore, even before the prolongation of parental leave, in 2010 a paternity leave was introduced.

- Paternity leave – two weeks voluntarily taken by fathers that can be used during first year from the child birth. Those two weeks are fully paid.

Main challenges regarding parental leave in Poland:

- Right to parental leave is derivative. It means that mother needs to have the right to maternity leave. If she does not work or didn't pay her insurance premium, she is not entitled to maternity leave, which automatically means that the father is not entitled to parental leave. In 2012 only 190 Polish men took part of the maternity leave that can be shared with mother. [ZUS, 2013]
- Men are not eager to exercise their rights to paternity leave. There are no accurate statistics in that matter (which should also be improved), but according to Social Insurance Institution in Poland only around 10% of men entitled to take the leave, used their right in 2012. [ZUS, 2013]

The governmental campaign aimed at increasing father's involvement in household duties was not very successful and didn't catch much attention among interested group. However, new projects and programmes are planned within different Ministries to encourage men to take paternity leave and share parental leave with mothers. Some NGO's are also focusing on that issue ex. organising series of workshop for fathers in different Polish cities together with Swedish trainers from Män för jämställdhet / Men for gender equality. Still, there are not many initiative focused on fatherhood and those that are holding conferences and speeches on the

role of father are often connected to religious movement, which makes the communication directed mostly into being a good role model for boys and taking responsibility for household in terms of breadwinning, rather than being responsible on the equal terms for household duties. Such communication petrifies the traditional model of Polish family, in which mother does not work and men are only breadwinners.

1.1.2 Men's involvement in combating gender-based and domestic violence

According to European data 18% of women experienced physical violence since the age of 15 [FRA, 2014]. However, we have to take into account that women in Poland are not eager to admit any kind of sexual or physical assault, because violence against women is still a taboo. If already 18% openly confessed that they were victims, it means that the problem in Poland is much bigger. As perpetrators are men in 93% of cases [Polish National Police, 2013], it is very important to work with them on combating this problem. There are no actions taken on the national level aimed at involving men in fighting gender-based violence. Ministry of Labour and Social Policy grants projects that have the male component, but mostly NGO's and governmental institutions focus on improving the quality of support for victims and changing laws in a way which would protect women and children against violent acts. Centrum Praw Kobiet [Women's Rights Centre] organises since 2009 a Polish edition of worldwide campaign "White ribbon", movement of men and boys working to end violence against women and girls, promote gender equity, healthy relationships and a new vision of masculinity. Each year men that are involved in combating violence against women are awarded with White Ribbon distinction. Although, the campaign is very honourable and highlights the men's aspect of combating gender-based violence, the main difference between Canadian prototype and Polish version, is that in Poland it is organised by NGO fighting for women's rights, while in Canada the staff of the project consists mostly of men. It shows a significant feature of Polish movement for men's engagement not only in combating gender-based and domestic violence, but also in gender equality as a broader concept. Most of the actions taken within its frames are organised by women. However, there are some examples of Polish initiatives for men run by men, such as the movement "Men against violence against women".

Men's involvement in combating gender-based violence is crucial, as they are the perpetrators to a greater extent. We should not forget though about the fact that 10% of victims of domestic violence are men [Polish National Police, 2013]. This problem is neglected in Polish society and should be more highlighted in governmental policies and actions. All of the projects combating gender-based violence are addressed to women and are run by women's organisations.

1.1.3 Combating segregation on the labour market

Polish labour market is very much gender segregated, both in terms of gender stereotypes and gender pay gap. These two aspects interfere bringing women to work in the professions which are less paid, while lower wages deter men from taking up jobs in educational sector or public administration. Again, most of the actions taken in order to combat gender segregation, are aimed at involving women in so called "male" professions. Very successful campaign "Girls to Engineering" run by Polish educational magazine with support of various Ministries, encourages female high school graduates to pursue their career in STEM sector. The campaign

runs for 6 years already and the number of female students at the Universities of Technology increased from 31% to 37%.

Unfortunately, this good practice of actions focused on one gender was not transferred to similar actions for men in childcare facilities or school. This kind of campaign is indeed needed, but firstly a stereotype of men working in kindergarten being paedophile or sexually unsettled needs to be combated.

2. Policy debate

Policy debate on men and gender equality focuses on men as fathers only. Together with introduction of new law on parental leave a wide campaign “Weż urlop, ojciec” [Take leave, father] was organised by main Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Women’s Congress and Institute of Public Affairs in order to establish 2 months of parental leave “for-fathers-only”. The idea of specific time reserved only for fathers (if they didn’t use their months, the parental leave would be shorter) was widely discussed in Polish public debate. It triggered the most frequently raised arguments that government should not interfere with family decisions and family is an unique entity in Polish society with its autonomy that should not be limited by the state. It reveals one of the main obstacles for implementing any obligatory measures enhancing gender equality in Poland. The supporters of the “only-for-fathers” solution highlighted the fact that mother has to take obligatory 14 weeks of leave and cannot resign from it, even if she wanted. Apparently, this legislative mechanism does not “mess up” with the concept of traditional Polish family, so there is no need to change it.

The policy debate will raise in the next few months due to the fact, that Minister of Labour and Social Policy is obligated to evaluate the first 1,5 years of enforcement of the Bill. Paternity leave, low rates of exercising this right and more equal shares of parental leave division will surely dominate the discussion.

3. Transferability issues

3.1. Austria

The most interesting good practice from Austria, which could be implemented in Poland, is parental part-time work up to the moment when child is seven years old. In Poland this option is provided only until child reaches 3 years old. Prolongation of the combination of work and childcare until 7 years old would be a good solution regarding the fact, that Poland has still problems with providing day care facilities for children. According to Eurostat Poland used to be on the last place among all EU member states comparing percentage of children between the age of 3 and the mandatory school age cared for in formal structures. Only a little bit more than 40% of children were cared in day care facilities. This rate may have raised due to the fact that government invests in childcare facilities from 2013, but the fact is still most of Polish children are outside the childcare system. The reason is partly limited number of places in kindergartens and partly the fact that parents do not support other than familial care at the first stage of child development. The extension of part-time work according to the Austrian model could encourage women to come back to work earlier and send children to day care facilities for at least part of the day or few

days a week. This solution might be opposed by entrepreneurs and employers in Poland though.

A very interesting practice would be creation of the Department for Men's Politics as an institution aimed at analysing male-specific problems and implementing solutions. However, as an experience with the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment shows, it would not obtain separate operational budget, which would limit its scope of actions. On the other hand, many interesting projects and initiatives are organised by OGPET in Poland, thanks to European funding, which means that the Men's Department could also benefit from specific granting schemes.

3.2. Iceland

The most important good practice, which could be transferred to Poland is perspective on parental leave as a right of the child, not only of the parents. One of the main objectives of the parental leave regulations in Iceland is to ensure that children would receive care from both parents. This approach would be very useful when promoting paternity leave in Poland.

Another important practice is non-transferable leave for fathers. This is the mechanism that many NGOs are advocating in Poland right now, but are not successful in their endeavours. An important aspect highlighted in Icelandic Discussion Paper is the fact, that non-transferrable leave was introduced as an additional part of the leave. It means, that the families were not deprived from some part of the leave they were already entitled to, as it is presented in Polish debate, but it was an additional time that families had an opportunity to take advantage of.

The main obstacle for implementing the good practice of non-transferable paternity leave in Poland is the notion of a family, that government should not interfere with. However the discourse of children rights and proposing two months of non-transferrable leave for fathers as additional to existing model could be a way of neutralizing the reluctance towards non-transferrable leave in Polish society.

3.3. Finland

There are two best practices I would like to highlight from the variety on Finnish interesting examples of men and gender equality initiatives. The first one concerns gender sensitive education and the need of gender sensitive school system which is expressed by the Finnish government. In Poland the gender equal education is treated as something suspicious and politically incorrect. After endeavours of one of the Polish NGOs to implement some aspects of gender sensitive education in kindergartens a crusade against "*feminists who want to turn our children into gays*" was called by right-wing politicians and conservative media. However, new reading primer published by the Ministry of Education includes gender equality despite of open criticism by the Catholic Church, so there is a room for discussion on gender mainstreaming in education in Poland.

The second good practice is civic engagement of men around their issues. It is very important for men to speak on their behalf about male problems such as discrimination of men in family courts, but also male faults such as gender-based

violence. The fact that there are various men's groups in Finland putting into discussion issues important to different male groups: gay organisations, fathers' groups, mentoring for boys, allows gender equality to have both female and male voice. In Poland the main obstacle for enhancing this kind of civic activity among men is in general low social participation of Poles a very low civic engagement of men.