THE ULTIMATE BALANCING ACT

WORK AND FAMILY IN THE NORDIC REGION

THINK-PIECE

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Work and family in the Nordic region
Iselin Løvslett Danbolt

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ISELIN LØVSLETT DANBOLT

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"A job that prevents workers from balancing their work commitments with the need to care for their family members is not a decent job."

—The ILO, Women at Work: Trends 2016

THE ULTIMATE BALANCING ACT: WORK AND FAMILY IN THE NORDIC REGION

A 2015 poll of almost 10,000 women in the G20 countries found the often-elusive balance between work and family the top work-related issue (ILO, 2016). Yet, many companies still view what happens for women and men at work as mutually exclusive from what happens to women and men at home (ILO, 2015a).

Policies that promote a harmonious work and family life are the missing link to more and better jobs for women in particular, but also for men the world over: making workplaces and companies family-friendly drives inclusion and fosters a more engaged workforce. For those employers who have discovered this “golden ticket”, companies’ competitive advantage and their talent pool are strengthened. A work-family balance is key to people’s wellbeing: where paid and unpaid work is shared equally between women and men, stress is reduced and everyone is happier (EC, 2016).

THE NORDIC REGION: A FAMILY-FRIENDLY PLACE TO BE

Across the Nordic region (including Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Greenland, Åland and the Faroe Islands), about 22 per cent of all families (most of whom, about 77 per cent, consist of married or cohabiting couples) have children (NCM, 2014). This is the case for almost 40 per cent of Icelandic families and 27 per cent of Danish and Norwegian families. Sweden and Finland have the region’s lowest share, estimated to be at about 20 per cent (NCM, 2015). In the

Faroe Islands, it is estimated that, in 2012, the number of children per woman was 2.53, whereas Greenland had 1.79 children, and Åland 1.99 children per woman (NCM, 2013). Although the approaches taken across the Nordic nations vary considerably, a common denominator is, on the whole, that these economies have made it possible for parents to combine work and family, which has resulted in more women participating in the labour force, more women in management positions and on companies’ boards, a better shared participation in childcare, a more equitable distribution of work at home, a better work-life balance for both women and men and, in some cases, a boost to declining fertility rates (Zahidi, 2015).

Source: Nordic Statistics, 2016a.
Note: Åland 2014. See definition 1 page 31.

WHAT WORKS FOR WORKING NORDIC WOMEN AND MEN WITH FAMILIES?

The link between employment and perhaps the most challenging and important job of all, parenthood, is far from clear-cut. Studies show that childbirth—and the unequal sharing of unpaid care and household work as well as parental leave (Duvander and Lammi-Taskula, 2011)—can have negative short-term effects on women's employment prospects, whereas in the longer-term this discrepancy evens out towards levels reached before childbirth (EC, 2014). For men, the picture is far clearer: fatherhood and employment appear to go hand in hand, as in all European countries, where fathers are more likely to be employed than men without children (EC, 2014).

DUAL-EARNER+DUAL-CARER: GETTING NORDIC WOMEN OUT OF THE HOUSE AND BACK TO WORK

Today's high female labour force participation in many of the Nordic countries is undoubtedly linked to a shift, during the 1960 and 70s, from a "breadwinner and house-wife" model, when discussions on work-family balance kicked off and measures needed for women to combine their working life with their home life were put in place (Niskanen and Nyberg, 2009).

It is estimated that the employment rates of mothers in 2014 with at least one child aged 0–14 in Sweden, Denmark, and Finland were at 83.1 per cent, 81.9 per cent and 73.6 per cent, respectively (OECD, 2013). In Norway the employment rate of mothers with children aged 0–15 was 84.5 per cent in 2014 (Statistics Norway, 2016). This shows that—in many ways—these measures have worked

in getting women out of the house and into paid work. On the flip side, however, according to a recent ILO survey, women's family responsibilities were seen as the number one barrier to women's leadership (ILO, 2015b).

WHO WORKS AROUND THE HOUSE?

In the Nordic region, men do more domestic chores than ever before and women are doing less. In a global perspective, Nordic men are among those who do more domestic work (ILO, 2016). In spite of this trend towards a more equal distribution of chores over the past two decades, women still contribute significantly more to household work than men, which can have labour force implications.

Source: Nordic Statistics, 2016b.

ARE YOU MAN ENOUGH TO WORK IN HEALTHCARE?

Norway has a great need for trained health personnel and in 2010 a unique partnership came about targeting men between 25 and 55 years old who receive benefits from the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). Men who join this programme are given the title health recruits and are offered apprenticeship training that will lead to them being certified health workers. The salary is split between NAV and the relevant municipality. This project is seen as a long-term initiative to get more men into healthcare, with scope for replication.

More information: www.mennihelse.no (in Norwegian).

A WOMAN'S JOB OR A MAN'S JOB? HOW SEGREGATION BREEDS SEGREGATION

The Nordic labour market is still segregated by sex, in spite of a widespread commitment to gender equality in the region—a dichotomy often described as the welfare state paradox. In 2015, 46 per cent of working women were either in education or health and social services (where you would only find 13 per cent men) whereas men were more often found in the manufacturing, construction, and transportation and storage sectors (Nordic Statistics, 2016d). In the latter industries, where 48 per cent of men in the Nordic region work, you only find 15 per cent women (Nordic Statistics, 2016d). Within a work-family context, there may be a reason why women are concentrated in these, often public, sectors, as they may provide more flexible working solutions for women, whereas many men opt to work in the private sector to optimise their ability to provide for their families. For those women and men who wish to break the cycle of traditional roles in the labour market and in education, gender segregation can make this tough and may increase the risk of discrimination (NIKK, 2015).

Some studies have, however, shown that Denmark, Norway and Sweden have experienced a relatively fast occupational desegregation in recent years, a shift that has resulted in the region moving from a group of countries with highly segregated sector to moderately gender segregated sectors (Ellingsæter, 2013). Also, whereas more

women are moving into male-dominated fields, the opposite still does not yet appear to be true, across the board (NIKK, 2015).

International comparisons often describe Nordic labour markets as highly segregated by sex and observe that countries which are traditionally considered less gender equal are seen to experience less occupational segregation. This could be explained by the amount of care work and work around the home that occurs in many other parts of the world that is shouldered by unpaid family workers and paid workers outside of the formal economy. A study by the Norwegian Institute of Social Research is exploring what this picture would look like if care work and work around the home is considered its own profession. In this case, it is argued, countries' large occupational segregation gap will be bridged, as care- and housework is still almost exclusively done by women in certain countries. When care work, including domestic chores, is considered as a profession and is monetized, Norway is one of the least occupationally segregated countries (Barth *et al.*, 2014).

PART-TIME WORK AND FAMILY RECONCILIATION

A key feature of the Nordic labour market for women is the propensity for part-time work, which is partly facilitated by legislation (for instance see page 23). Part-time work can indeed facilitate the combination of economic empowerment with child rearing and care responsibilities. But it is far more common

WHAT THE ILO SAYS ABOUT WORK AND FAMILY:

The ILO's Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156) and its accompanying Recommendation No. 165 were adopted in 1981 to "create effective equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women workers". The Convention seeks to promote policies to reduce work-family conflict and combat discrimination resulting from family responsibilities.

The Convention calls for measures, among others, to: prohibit discrimination in employment against workers with family responsibilities; support terms and conditions of employment allowing for work-family balance; develop or promote family friendly services and facilities such as childcare and other family services; provide training to allow workers with family responsibilities to become and remain integrated in the workforce, as well as to re-enter after an absence due to those responsibilities; set up social security benefits, tax relief and other measures; promote information and education for better gender equality at home and at work.

in industries largely dominated by women—although the share of male part-time workers has increased in all Nordic countries except for Iceland. Approximately half of all women in the Faroe Islands work part-time (Hayfield *et al.*, 2016). Finland, on the other hand, differs from the other Nordic countries by having a tradition—stemming back to the post-World War II era—of female full-time employment, which has led to fewer women in part-time work today (Lanninger and Sundström, 2014).

Statistics also distinguish between part-time work that is "voluntary" and "involuntary" (i.e. the inability to find full-time work). From a gender perspective, however, the choice to work part-time needs to be seen in the context of structural constraints and insufficient measures that give women and men an equal opportunity—on equal footing—to combine successful careers with a successful family life.

WHAT THE ILO SAYS ABOUT MATERNITY PROTECTION:

The ILO works towards ensuring the wellbeing of mothers and their new-borns, to enable women to successfully combine their reproductive and their productive roles, to prevent unequal treatment at work because of their reproductive role and to promote the principle of equality of opportunity and treatment between women and men. The ILO's Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) mandates a minimum leave period of 14 weeks around childbirth, whereas its accompanying Recommendation (No. 191) promotes maternity leave of at least 18 weeks. Maternity protection is, simply put: maternity leave, health protection at work for pregnant and breastfeeding women, cash and medical benefits, employment protection and non-discrimination, and breastfeeding support after women return to work. More information: <http://www.ilo.org/maternity>.

OUT OF OFFICE: MATERNAL, PATERNAL AND PARENTAL LEAVE IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

One fail-safe way to reduce maternity-related discrimination and to narrow the gender pay gap—in other words take major strides towards gender equality—is to put in place decent parental leave policies for both women and men (ILO, 2015b). From a health perspective, taking leave helps women recover from pregnancy, childbirth and establish breastfeeding, but parental leave is much more than that. It is also a strategic economic decision: when dads look after their children, moms can go back to work and early child development is boosted by both parents taking part in child rearing. Simply put: it is good for parents, good for children, and good for the economy.

NORDIC COUNTRIES PUTTING THEIR MONEY WHERE THEIR MOUTH IS FOR MOTHERS AND FAMILIES

The Nordic countries have put their policies into action by introducing more and more measures that enable both parents to work and to have fulfilling family lives while recognising that parental leave is essential, from a child rights perspective as well.

Sweden was the first country in the world to introduce shared parental leave in the 1970s and offers the longest leave in the region today, with an income-related parental benefit of up to 70 weeks (or 480 days). In Finland income-related parental benefits are available for all parents. In most Finnish sectors it has been separately agreed through collective agreements to give mothers a full

wage during part of their leaves, commonly 3 months. Denmark gives 52 weeks' leave after a birth or adoption with a state allowance, of which 32 weeks can be shared by the parents (Witcome, 2013). Iceland has the shortest with less than 40 weeks. Since 2000, Icelandic mothers and fathers are each entitled to three months' non-transferable leave when a child is born. Parents then have an additional three months, which they can distribute between themselves. During their leave, both women and men receive 80 per cent of their salary—up to a certain maximum level (EEA, 2016). In Norway parents can choose to take up to 59 weeks in total (with 80 per cent of the salary or 100 per cent of the salary for 49 weeks). Ten weeks' non-transferable parental leave is reserved for each parent. Norwegian mothers have three additional weeks before a child is born.

Today, Faroese women and men enjoy a total of 44 weeks of paid leave when becoming parents (up from 38 weeks in 2015). The first 14 weeks are reserved for mothers. The remaining 26 weeks are left for the parents to divide between them. In Greenland, mothers are entitled to 15 weeks' maternity leave. Also, parents have 17 weeks of parental leave to share as they wish, thus making the maximum potential maternity leave for women 34 weeks. The Åland Islands give parents the same benefits as in mainland Finland: 50 to 52 weeks' paid parental leave with income-related benefits, part of which can be shared among them until the child is nine years old

DID YOU KNOW? A study in Sweden showed that for every month dad took for parental leave, mum's future earnings increased by 7 per cent

(Johansson, 2010).

(a total of 158 days). For parents with children younger than nine, they have the opportunity to work part-time and, depending on the age of the child, receive benefits.

INVESTING IN FATHERS, TOO

Norway decided, in 1993, to put in place earmarked leave for fathers only and others have followed suit (NIKK, 2016). In 2003 Finland put in place four weeks' earmarked leave for fathers and in 2013 further changes were made enabling fathers a total of nine weeks' leave until the child turns two, which means max three weeks shared leave with mothers (NIKK, 2016). Four weeks are reserved for Faroese fathers, two weeks for Danish fathers with pay or a state allowance, and three weeks are reserved for fathers in Greenland. The Åland Islands has the same benefits as Finland. Recently Sweden introduced an extra month, intended for the father, in addition to the obligatory 90 days' paternity leave.

The paternal leave investments have paid off: with the introduction of earmarked paternal leave in most countries, Nordic men take off more time from work to be with their children than anywhere else in the world (Björk, 2014). The uptake rates are rising: Iceland and Sweden are in the lead with respectively 28.5 and 25.5 per cent of the number of days taken by the father in 2013. Since 2000, all Nordic countries have registered an increase of fathers' take-up of parental benefits, in

addition to the number of days taken per new-born (NCM, 2015).

Extensive leave is also made available in the Nordic countries, should a child fall sick: for instance, in Norway, each parent has the right to ten days a year of paid leave if their children under 12 fall sick, and 15 days if they have more than two children. This comes in addition to the normal sick leave offered (EEA, 2016). In Finland the number of days is not limited by calendar year, but by the length of leave and the age: parents may take four days leave per each occasion of illness for a child under ten years old.

EASY ACCESS TO PARENTAL BENEFITS:

The service "My Pages" offers Swedish women and men a Smartphone-compatible application so that parents, instead of filling out papers for temporary parental leave when staying home with their sick child, can apply for those benefits online. Now, approximately 43 per cent of all logins are through the app. The 1.2 million users log in 80 per cent more often than before the app was introduced. In addition, 24 per cent of all applications for temporary parental leave are now done via this app. Parents have expressed their satisfaction with this function and the app was downloaded more than 200,000 times in the first three months, alone.

More information: <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/work-life-balance/>.

DID YOU KNOW? Today, women are entitled to maternity leave with pay or a state allowance (with employment protection) in all OECD countries but one (the United States). Ninety-eight countries around the world meet the ILO standard of at least 14 weeks' maternity leave (ILO, 2015a). Paternity leave—with payment rates at 100 per cent of their salaries—has only been put in place in about half of OECD countries and, globally, men are awarded much less parental leave, rarely more than a few days. This is the case in Austria, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Italy, where paternity leave amounts to three days or less

(OECD, 2010; ILO, 2016).

CARING ABOUT CHILDCARE AND ELDERCARE IN THE NORDIC REGION

Each and every one of us benefits from care work. And most of us require care or support at several stages of our lives (ILO, 2016). Care, and access to care services, also has profound effects on the world of work: by reducing stress associated with child and eldercare, companies minimise absenteeism and boost the productivity of workers. And, in 2016, women still bear the main brunt of caregiving. By ensuring, for instance, that childcare is readily available and affordable, more women can re-enter the labour force and the gender pay gap is smaller (ILO, 2015b). The Nordic countries have come a long way in showing that they care about care: by investing in childcare, parental insurance and elderly care, the dual-earner model has been strengthened (NIKK, 2014).

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE: NORDIC COUNTRIES AND CHILDCARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Across the region, a significant share of public spending on policies that reconcile work and family is dedicated to early childhood care and education (ILO, 2016). From an outsider's perspective, there are remarkable similarities across the Nordic countries' ideologies, policies, and practices regarding childcare, but, upon a closer glance, the speed at which, for instance, public day care and early childhood education has become accessible, varied greatly in the Nordic countries in the 1970s and 1980s.

Today, most Nordic children between three and five years old are in early childhood education. With the exception of Finland, between 91 and 97 per cent of all children in this age group are in day care institutions, whereas the figure for Finland is 74 per cent of girls and boys (Nordic Statistics, 2016c). As a result of generous maternal, paternal and parental leave policies, fewer girls and boys between zero and two years old are in day care, amounting to approximately half of children in the age group in 2014 (Nordic Statistics, 2016c).

Source: Nordic Statistics, 2016c.

Note: Åland 2004 and 2014. See definition 2 page 31.

DID YOU KNOW? The development of Nordic formal childcare systems started in the 1960s, which today is still seen as ground breaking for working parents and for society. Denmark was the first country to put in place legislation on day care in 1964, followed by Finland, Iceland, and Sweden in 1973 and Norway in 1975

(Eydal and Rostgaard, 2010).

What makes the Nordic countries unique in their approach to childcare is the right to day care after maternal, paternal and parental leave, which exists in all the Nordic countries except Iceland. Since 1994, Icelandic municipalities have, however, been legally obliged to ensure access to pre-school for all girls and boys between two and five years. In addition to the fact that all children are entitled to day care in Finland, the country has taken an additional approach, which can explain the relatively low percentage of children in day care, by providing home care subsidies until the child is three years old. Similar approaches have been introduced in the other Nordic countries—although the pick-up rate has greatly differed.

The childcare picture in the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland shares many similarities with the Nordic countries, although with a slight difference of scale. In the Faroe Islands, many parents do not wish for their children to spend too much time in day care which exacerbates the extent to which women (as the main caregivers) may choose to work part-time. Also, public childcare services are not adapted to the realities of many Faroese women, many of whom are by themselves with their children, as many Faroese men work far away from home and often do shift work. A defining feature of childcare in the Faroe Islands, Greenland and the Åland Islands is the underlying expectation that families are to contribute to care work whenever this is not adequately delivered by public services, which is particularly pronounced in childcare,

care for elderly, or ill family members and (lack of) provisions for families with children with special needs (Hayfield *et al.*, 2016).

INVESTING IN THOSE WHO INVESTED IN US: NORDIC COUNTRIES AND ELDERCARE

People today live longer than any previous generation. Although this is indeed a sign of progress and a reason to rejoice—as older women and men remain engaged, mobile, and active as caregivers—the ageing population can challenge workers and companies alike. The failure to support those workers who have eldercare responsibilities can be costly in terms of lost productivity, absenteeism, disengagement, turnover, and increased healthcare costs (ILO, 2015b).

Both daughters and sons are deeply affected by care for elderly parents or other family members. Daughters and sons have the same struggles in juggling their work tasks, meeting schedules, studies, and travels, and as a result, can be forced to either reduce their hours at work or to quit their jobs, entirely. A study from Sweden argues that working daughters' unpaid care responsibilities for older people have been a "blind spot" in Swedish eldercare policy, resulting in mental and physical exhaustion, difficulties in finding time for leisure and a reduced ability to focus on their paid work (Ulmanen, 2015). Although eldercare in welfare states is generous, the high labour force participation rate of both women and men complicates matters when their parents' care arrangements do not work.

DID YOU KNOW? The 2015 European Working Conditions Survey shows that family-friendly practices have not become more common. Most women and men at work still have their work schedules entirely decided upon by their employers, most working hours are still regular (37.5 to 40 hours per week), although 31 per cent of respondents admit to being affected by last minute changes, which complicates childcare arrangements. 35 per cent of workers are also not able to take an hour or two off to attend urgent personal or family matters (EC, 2016).

VISIBLE FATHERS:

A Finnish project, which runs from February 2016 until January 2018, aims to create knowledge and tools for gender equality and work-family balance, and to raise awareness about paternity leave possibilities. The project also aims to promote positive attitudes and practices related to the pick-up of rate of paternity leave—at workplaces and among employers—by creating knowledge about the obstacles to paternity leave and offering support to male-dominated sectors. A separate campaign will strengthen ties between fathers on leave and child and family professionals. More information: <https://www.thl.fi/en/web/thlfi-en/research-and-expertwork/projects-and-programmes/visible-fathers>

STRENGTH IN FLEXIBILITY: WORKING ARRANGEMENTS THAT WORK FOR FAMILIES IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

In a perfect world, the perfect job—with the perfect boss—would offer us some flexibility as to when we come, and when we go, whether we can work from home or whether we can take a few hours off should something unforeseen happen. Flexible work arrangements can take many forms: it could include revisiting working hours and part-time work—for both women and men—or flexi-time, it could also include telecommuting or working from home.

By offering family friendly and family-focused benefits at work employees get to manage their work responsibilities alongside those of their families, which, in turn, can help companies strengthen their competitive advantage. A UK study shows that among companies offering flexible working arrangements, 76 per cent report that it has improved staff retention, 73 per cent report that it has improved staff motivation and 72 per cent report that it has improved the level of employee engagement (ILO, 2015b). Working mothers are more likely to stay in a flexible workplace. And family-friendly workplaces that encourage the fathers' involvement in the household have a positive impact on the ability of women to manage the pressures that work and family often bring (ILO, 2015b).

REDUCING AND RE-THINKING WORKING HOURS

Flexibility in working time allows parents to adjust their schedules at work to coincide

with school and/or childcare hours. Flexi-time can help women and men balance work and family life, giving workers a degree of control over the start and end of a workday, and sometimes being able to accumulate credit on extra hours worked to obtain days off.

According to the European Company Survey 2013, Denmark, Finland and Sweden have the highest proportion of companies that provide at least some workers with flexibility in working time arrangements, with 98.5 per cent of Finnish companies offering flexible working time. In Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, more than half of all workers have at least some ability to set their own working time, with Swedish women more likely to do so (OECD, 2013).

In Iceland, many businesses and public institutions have flexible working hours—in a bid to help people better reconcile family and work. Employers are required by the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men to make the necessary arrangements to enable men and women to balance family life and jobs, including the arrangement of work in a flexible manner and parents being able to take leave from work in case of serious or unusual family circumstances (Eydal and Gíslason, 2013).

In Norway the Working Environment Act regulates working hours, which is currently at 40 hours per week. However, and in line with collective agreements, 37.5 hours at

DID YOU KNOW? Iceland is debating whether to shorten the workweek, which is at 40 hours. In parallel, the City of Reykjavik is running a pilot project where participants work 35 hours a week, to be evaluated in terms of productivity and as to whether these measures have had a positive effect on the family (EEA, 2016).

work per week is the norm in most industries and sectors. Furthermore, and according to this Act, all workers have the right to shorter working hours and flexible working hours if it is deemed necessary for health, social or other welfare reasons and if it does not cause major inconvenience to the employers. Often, parents exercise this conditional right if they have young children, as do older workers. In January 2016, the Government-appointed Commission on Working Time recommended to make it easier for employees, at their own request, to work late at night (after 21.00) to accommodate other activities (EEA, 2016).

In Denmark the Equal Treatment Act was amended in 2013 to also cover the right to request flexible working arrangements after parental leave and to protect those workers who may ask for flexibility from less favourable treatment. These amendments were aimed to further promote the Revised Framework Agreement between European social partners on parental leave (Council Directive 2010/18/EU) and implement the missing elements from the Directive not previously covered by Danish legislation (EP, 2015).

Although making the switch to part-time work can improve work-family balance while still encouraging women to work, across the board, mothers are much more likely to reduce

their working hours and go into part-time work compared to fathers (OECD, 2013). More and more men in the Nordic countries work part-time (NCM, 2015), but this is mainly because there is a lack of suitable full-time jobs and not necessarily to take care of their families. As shown in a 2014 European survey, 45 per cent of women responded they worked part-time to take care of children or incapacitated adults, whereas this was the case for only 14 per cent of part-time working fathers (EC, 2014).

The popularity of part-time work decreases with age in Finland and Denmark. Swedish women, however, tend to return, after childbirth, to part-time work instead of their former full-time jobs. In Norway, it is estimated that between 60 and 70 per cent of mothers in paid employment work fulltime, regardless of their children's age (Statistics Norway, 2016). In Denmark, while the popularity of part-time work decreases with age, it remains popular among women as an alternative to full-time work. In Finland, part-time work is clearly less popular than in the other Nordic countries, which may indicate either other kind of time-use preferences or that there are fewer part-time jobs available. Another explanation may also be that Finland has had a longer tradition of mothers and married women working mainly full-time (Lanninger and Sundström, 2014).

LEGISLATION CONCERNING FAMILY-RELATED WORKING TIME SCHEMES, 2015

COUNTRY	SCOPE	STATUTORY	CRITERIA	EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL PROTECTION
Denmark	-	No general statutory entitlement to part-time work. However, the 2013 amendments to the Equal Treatment Act regarding employment adopted in 2013 cover the right to ask for flexible working arrangements after parental leave and make precisions as to the protection or other adjustments to working time arrangements for family reasons.	-	-
Finland	Right to reduced hours	Parents with a child who has not yet reached the end of their second year at school are entitled to work reduced hours. Exact hours are subject to negotiation between the employee and the employer. The employer can refuse to comply with the request on serious business grounds. Depending on the age of the child, employees working reduced hours may be entitled to a "flexible care allowance" or "partial care allowance".	The employee must have been working for the same employer for at least six of the past twelve months.	Workers have the right to return to their previous hours following the reduced-hours period.
Iceland	Right to flexible working hours	Employers are legally required to provide arrangements that allow employees to balance work and family life.	-	-
Norway	Right to request reduced hours for family reasons	Employees with children under ten years of age have the right to request part-time work or a reduction in their working hours. Employers can refuse to comply only on serious business grounds.	-	Employees have the right to return to their previous hours following the reduced-hours period.
Sweden	Right to reduced hours for family reasons	Workers with children under 8 years of age have the right to reduce their working hours by 25%.	Limited to workers who have been employed by the same employer for at least 6 months or for not less than 12 months in the past two years.	Employees have the right to return to their previous hours following the reduced-hours period.

Source: OECD, 2013.

DID YOU KNOW? A study shows that almost 50 per cent of Finnish women consider part-time work better than full-time work for women with children under school age

(Ylikännö, 2013).

In the Faroe Islands, Greenland and the Åland Islands part-time work is very common, with women in the Faroe Islands and the Åland Islands having some of the highest part-time work rates in Europe. There is little difference between women and men's extent of part-time work in Greenland. Finding a work-family balance is also the main reason many women opt to not work full-time. With very high levels of occupational segregation and since women still carry the main caregiver responsibility at home—whilst men work outside of the home for long hours or periods of time—embedded gender roles are still present in these three areas, at large (Hayfield *et al.*, 2016).

A study from Sweden argues that the attempt to individualise parents' right to shorter working time has been gender-blind in nature (Nyberg, 2012). In order for part-time work to be effective, measures need to be put in place to minimise income loss associated with reductions in working and other obstacles, such as preventing a hampered career advancement, which some women may accept in order to meet family responsibilities. The ILO Part-time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175) calls for the adoption of the principle of equal treatment of part-time workers on a pro-rata wages and benefits basis comparable to that accorded to full-time employees. Essential to this is also revisiting how care is shared at home, so as to ensure both mothers and fathers can choose what type of working hours work for them. Easing the return of parents that have been

on maternity and parental leave into the paid labour force will contribute to avoiding part-time work becoming a long-term trap (ILO, 2016).

TAKING WORK HOME: TELECOMMUTING AND ALTERNATIVE OFFICING

Telecommuting—or working from home—is on the rise, and there are several factors that drive the migration of working women and men back home. Many argue that telework is beneficial to the environment, for workers—with or without children—and employers, alike (Aldrich, 2010). In Finland around 30 per cent of male employees and 25 per cent of female employees report having worked from home in the past three months, while in Denmark these rates are as high as 35 per cent and 30 per cent, respectively. There are more women in Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Norway who, once in a while, work from home than in most parts of the world (OECD, 2013). In Norway, working from home has since the early 2000s been most common for entrepreneurs, those in academia, and for parents who normally work long office hours (Rønsen and Kitterød, 2012). The 2002 European Framework Agreement on Telework has offered a way for the Nordic countries to put in place either "hard" laws through for instance collective agreements (Denmark) or "soft" laws (Sweden, Finland, and Norway) governing workers' right to work remotely or from home (Welz and Wolf, 2010).

DID YOU KNOW?

Nordic women currently rank fourth in overall digital fluency according to the Accenture Digital Fluency Model, which bodes well for those who wish to telecommute or use alternative "officing" today

(Accenture, 2016).

With the leaps and bounds of progress in information communication technology (ICT) over the past decades, telecommuting has become easier than ever. ICT supports working outside the confines of an office at virtually any time of the day or night, and the Smartphone is one of the newest work tools. A recent Accenture study argues that digital tools is helping close the gender gap at work and that the increasing use of technology can serve as a key means of enabling all workers

in the search of a better and more flexible balance between private and professional lives. The study argues that whilst both men and women are liberated by the balance that work flexibility awards—brought about in the digital era—women appear to derive greater value from it and half of the women in their survey said they use digital tools as a means to work from home and to access job opportunities (Accenture, 2016).

BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY, THE NORDIC WAY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Nordic “family of nations” shares a common historical and cultural heritage dating back centuries and the region has collaborated on family law matters for almost hundred years. More than that, the region also shares a strong belief in the gender equal ideal (Rostgaard, 2014).

GOOD REASON TO BE PROUD...

The region can proudly claim one of the highest female labour force participation rates in the world, some of the most flexible and generous leave, care services and work arrangements for both mothers and fathers. Some researchers, however, argue that it is hard to compare statistics across the region, because of policy differences, but also in the way statistics are presented, which calls for more Nordic and comparative collaboration (Duvander and Lammi-Taskula, 2011).

...BUT NOT TO BE COMPLACENT

In a European context—and in spite of large efforts to ensure that workers are healthier and happier at work and outside of work—work-life balance policies have led to very mixed results. Although these measures have been key to tear down the many obstacles to female employment, it is still mostly women who use the available measures. Although many good practices in reversing occupational segregation exist across the region, this division between women and men’s jobs

still plays a huge role in the labour market, career advancement, and wage opportunities for women and men. Women still do most household chores and are more likely to find themselves working part-time to make sure their families are taken care of.

SEPARATE BUT EQUAL?

Although on the surface, very similar, the responses to ensure a healthy and happy work and family balance across the Nordic countries have in some cases varied greatly. Sweden has had a broad institutionalisation of gender equality since the 1960s, shaping the future course for work and family measures, such as leave and childcare policies. Denmark, on the other hand, while being the first country to legislate on day care, has taken a less ideological approach to gender equality. Denmark’s more pragmatic approach has ensured more women in the labour market due to a childcare system that has had a clear focus on the pedagogical needs of girls and boys.

GETTING MORE DADS ON THE DADDY TRACK?

Unlike the other Nordic countries, Denmark has encountered challenges in providing earmarked paternity leave rights. It was introduced in 1998 but abolished again in 2001. Iceland offers a mandatory 13 weeks of paternity leave, which has led to more than

90 per cent of men taking parental leave. All Nordic countries have seen an increase in fathers' shares of the parental benefits as well as in the number of days taken per new-born in total from 2000 to 2013 (NCM, 2015), which makes the point for promoting men's role in the care of new-borns.

SHOULD WOMEN WORK MORE OR SHOULD MEN WORK LESS?

The part-time conundrum is not an easy nut to crack in the Nordic region. The discussions around women's part-time work differ to some extent across the countries, and in many cases there is both a social and cultural acceptance of a woman's choice to not work full-time. Whereas many of the countries, from a labour and gender equality perspective, view part-time work as less than ideal for women and society at large, it is supported as a way to better balance family and work. If full-time employment is considered the only ideal form of work—which can also have a negative impact on the important discussions on reducing working hours in general—men's working time still sets the norm for women's work. The question one should perhaps ask oneself in this case is; should we be looking at women to work more or could it be that men should work less (NIKK, 2014)?

ARE WE GETTING PAID NOT TO WORK?

A key element of providing women and men with more flexible forms of work to be better caregivers at home is to examine any lasting impact these measures have had. Has it lead to greater productivity? Where studies have shown that not many people opt to telecommute, for instance, can we say for sure that this is something that works, in practice? More research is needed, as many argue that reduced working hours for all will further put a strain on the economy and lead to reduced competitiveness—even if many work better when they are not forced to fulfil forty-hour weeks. Is this a way of paying people not to work? Or are we not looking out for the smaller and medium-sized businesses in demanding that they pay for people's absence (read: maternity, paternity, and parental leave) and reduced working hours?

PUTTING THE BREAK ON YOUR CAREER BEFORE ACCELERATING?

On the one hand, paid maternity leave helps to increase women's motivation to go back to work and gives future mothers further incentive to stay at work, with a view to come back after the end of their leave period. On the other hand, where leave arrangements are for longer periods of time, such as in the Nordic countries—where most women make full use of their leave as their right—lengthy career breaks are bound to happen, which can have a negative impact on them as

individuals, their careers' trajectories, and wage earning potential, and for society, at large. Some argue that generous family-friendly policies in the Nordic welfare states have been counterproductive in achieving one of their main goals—gender equality—leading to a "boomerang" effect on women's position in the labour market (Rønsen and Kitterød, 2012). Without adequate training, education, and re-entry programmes, it appears that women's roles at work will never be what they were, what they could have been, and what they should be. Evidence has shown that the work-family balance measures have in some ways failed women, as having children is still seen as a deterrent to making it into the executive suites, in spite of a range of initiatives being put in place.

TIME TO THINK OUTSIDE OF THE (HETERONORMATIVE) BOX?

Endless amounts of research and proverbial patting ourselves on the back for being great for families have taken place in the Nordic countries since the introduction of, let's be honest, the world's most innovative and generous work-family measures. Good for families, good for mothers, fathers, and children—we say. But are we not forgetting that, in 2016, the (rainbow) family constellation is very different from what it was since the region started creating legislation for childcare, parental leave, etc. in the 1950s, 60s and 70s? The Nordic region

has come far in promoting LGBT family rights, by, for instance, giving access to second-parent and joint parent adoption for same-sex couples (COWI, 2011), but only limited research seeks to analyse LGBT work-life realities. We should not ignore that LGBT women and men have (work-family balance) needs to match their rights as well.

FURTHER AREAS OF INTEREST, WITH AN EYE TO REPLICABILITY:

Nordic approaches to ensure gender equality at work are garnering more and more interest the world over. Experiences and challenges from the Nordic countries related to reconciling work and family could represent useful knowledge for other countries that are considering investing in these areas. In understanding how change has been driven, decision-makers in other regions could be interested in analysing and replicating certain aspects of Nordic approaches. For instance, were changes the result of pressures from women's or trade unions' movements, or of economic needs that required an increase of women in the labour market? What were the good practices to reduce occupational segregation? And did the development of childcare systems clash with the traditional gendered patterns of caregiving?

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Definition 1: The activity rate is the percentage of the economically active population aged 15-64 on the total population of the same age, thus providing an indication of the size of the supply of labour available to engage in the production of goods and services.

The economically active population (also called labour force) is the sum of employed and unemployed persons. The employment rate is thus lower than the activity rate (or labour force participation rate), depending on a given country's unemployment rate.

Definition 2: Day care includes care of all children, whether full-time or part-time, during day-time hours in all institutions where attendance is checked by a public authority. The share of children in day care is calculated based on the mid-year population count for the age group.

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Nordic approaches to ensure gender equality in the labour market are garnering more and more interest the world over. This think-piece reviews and discusses Nordic approaches to facilitate the often elusive work-family balance. Investments made in care and leave schemes for parents and their children have led to high labour forces participation rates for both women and men, while also ensuring a more equal balance of responsibilities, at work and at home. However, the Nordic labour markets continue to be sex-segregated, with a persistent gender pay gap.

This think-piece raises key points for discussion on gender equality in the Nordic region, giving input into ongoing Nordic cooperation and the International Labour Organization's Women at Work Centenary Initiative.