

Parental leave, childcare and gender equality in the Nordic countries





Parental leave, childcare and gender equality in the Nordic countries

Ingólfur V. Gíslason and Guðný Björk Eydal (eds.)

Parental leave, childcare and gender equality in the Nordic countries

Ingólfur V. Gíslason and Guðný Björk Eydal (eds.)

TemaNord 2011:562

ISBN 978-92-893-2278-2

© Nordic Council of Ministers, Copenhagen 2011

Print: Arco Grafisk A/S

Copies: 800

Cover photo: Image Select

Printed in Denmark



This publication has been published with financial support by the Nordic Council of Ministers. But the contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views, policies or recommendations of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Nordic co-operation

Nordic cooperation is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland.

Nordic cooperation has firm traditions in politics, the economy, and culture. It plays an important role in European and international collaboration, and aims at creating a strong Nordic community in a strong Europe.

Nordic cooperation seeks to safeguard Nordic and regional interests and principles in the global community. Common Nordic values help the region solidify its position as one of the world's most innovative and competitive.

Nordic Council of Ministers

Ved Stranden 18

DK-1061 København K

Phone (+45) 3396 0200

Fax (+45) 3396 0202

www.norden.org

Content

Preface.....	7
About the authors.....	9
Foreword.....	11
Introduction.....	13
1. Parental leave.....	31
1.1 History of the development of the Nordic leave system.....	33
1.2 The leave system in 2010.....	34
1.3 Patterns of leave use.....	46
1.4 What factors influence the use of parental leave?.....	52
1.5 Discussion and summary.....	59
References.....	61
2. Day-care schemes and cash-for-care at home.....	65
2.1 ECEC services.....	67
2.2 Cash grants for care.....	88
2.3 Conclusion: the relevance of childcare policies for the Nordic welfare model.....	98
References.....	102
3. Family policies and the best interest of children.....	109
3.1 Children’s wellbeing now and in the future.....	112
3.2 The significance of the first years of life for a child’s development.....	114
3.3 Parental leave and the best interest of children.....	116
3.4 Fathers.....	125
3.5 Kindergartens and the best interest of children.....	128
3.6 How early should children start kindergarten?.....	133
3.7 How long should a kindergarten day be?.....	136
3.8 Summary/conclusion.....	138
References.....	140
4. Toward a Nordic childcare policy – the political processes and agendas.....	147
4.1 The role of political parties in policy-making.....	148
4.2 Nordic policies: co-operation on childcare and gender equality policy.....	149
4.3 Underlying motives: the best interests of the child and parents’ labour market participation.....	152
4.4 Nordic discourse: “Use it or lose it” or freedom of choice?.....	158
4.5 Party politics and childcare policies in the Nordic countries.....	160
4.6 Conclusion.....	170
References.....	173
Appendix A.....	179

Preface

The Nordic countries are often seen as pioneers in the area of gender equality. It is true that the position of women in Nordic societies is generally stronger than in the rest of the world. There is an explicit drive in most – or perhaps all – areas of society to promote and strengthen equality between women and men. In recent years, some significant changes have occurred on the family front, where men now assume a greater share of childcare, household work and other tasks that used to be primarily women's domain.

Occasionally, we hear questions in the context of public debate as to whether the investments we have made to ensure equal opportunities, rights and obligations for women and men have in fact occurred at the expense of children. This concerns particularly the expansion of childcare and the system of shared parental leave.

This book addresses some of these questions through an overview of political and policy developments in Nordic parental leave and childcare. In addition, the book describes research on the situation of Nordic children and their wellbeing as viewed through international comparisons.



Pia Erson

Head of Department
Nordic Council of Ministers

About the authors

Johanna Lammi-Taskula is a special researcher and head of unit at Finland's National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL). Her research focuses on balancing family and working life from a gender equality perspective. She is particularly interested in the effects of family policy on gender equality and welfare in everyday life.

Berit Brandth is Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology and Political Science at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim. Her research interests focus on the interface between family, work and care policy, with a particular emphasis on fathers and parental leave. The gender perspective is an important aspect in all of her publications, including the book "Fleksible fedre" ("Flexible fathers") (Universitetsforlaget 2003), which she co-edited with Elin Kvande.

Ann-Zofie Duvander is Associate Professor of Sociology at the Demography Unit of Stockholm University's Department of Sociology. Her research interests include family policies, the family-work connection and issues of family demographics. She has written about the distribution of parental leave and the impact of parental leave on mothers and fathers. She is a member of the Social Policy, Stockholm University's Linneaus Center on Social Policy and Family Dynamics in Europe.

Ingólfur V. Gíslason is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Iceland. He studies men and masculinities, violence, the labour market, parental leave and the rituals in sports. His most recent publications include a contribution to the book "Equal Rights to Earn and Care", which he co-edited with Guðný Björk Eydal.

Guðný Björk Eydal is Professor of Social Work at the University of Iceland. She studies family and child policy with a particular focus on child-care policies. She has been involved in several comparative initiatives and is currently a participant in the REASSESS Nordic Centre of Excellence in Welfare Research. Her publications include articles on child and family policies in the Nordic countries and many writings on childcare policy.

Tine Rostgaard is Professor MSO, Department of Political Science, Aalborg University in Denmark. Her primary research focus is on caring

for children and the elderly, frequently using a comparative approach, as in the book “Care between Work and Welfare in European Societies” (Palgrave 2011), which she co-edited with Birgit Pfau-Effinger. She is a member of several international research networks, including the REASSESS Nordic Centre of Excellence in Welfare Research and the RECOWE Nordic Centre of Excellence, which is part of the EU’s Seventh Framework Programme.

Foreword

In 2008, as then-president of Nordic co-operation, Iceland also directed Nordic co-operation on gender equality. From the starting point of the ongoing public debate that was taking place in all of the Nordic countries, it was decided that a new initiative would be adopted to explore the interplay between gender equality, parental leave and the situation of children. Gender researchers from all five Nordic countries have contributed to the project: Berit Brandth (Norway), Ann-Zofie Duvander (Sweden), Guðný Björk Eydal and Ingólfur V. Gíslason (Iceland), Johanna Lammi-Taskula (Finland) and Tine Rostgaard (Denmark).

The group divided the task of reporting into separate chapters, which, though each written by the above-named author(s), nonetheless benefit from the fact that the authors worked closely together as a team, exchanged information, shared their research findings, and read one another's chapters several times in the course of the project. However, each individual author is ultimately responsible for each chapter's final version and conclusions.

We would like to express our gratitude to the Nordic Council of Ministers for giving us the opportunity to work on this project and for all of their support. We also want to thank the REASSESS Nordic Centre of Excellence in Welfare Research for their financial support. We hope that this book contributes to the continued development of the Nordic model from the starting point that women and men share the same opportunities, rights and obligations and that the best interests of our children form the foundation for our society.

Introduction

Ingólfur V. Gíslason

The contributions in this book focus on aspects of the complicated interplay between childcare and gender equality. It is a critically important area of research, as the future of the Nordic model depends on how we succeed in making this interplay function well. The Nordic model has been characterised by the high rate of labour participation of both men and women, efforts to achieve equality between women and men, and by society's concerted investments into the care and education of children. The Nordic countries have tried to find a balance between the demands of working life, gender equality and the best interests of children. Balancing these factors can indeed be difficult, since they are not fixed entities but are affected by the interplay between them. For example, the very definition of "gender equality" and the "best interest" of children continually evolves, often because of changes that happen in the needs of working life.

By most accounts, the Nordic model has been relatively successful in the realms discussed in this book. Measured in global terms, the Nordic countries have managed to achieve a high level of equality between women and men. They also seem to have done rather well in terms of the health and wellbeing of children. These achievements have been made possible by a well-functioning working life and overall prosperity. In recent years, however, signs of stagnation have emerged – what has sometimes been described as a "gender squeeze". It seems that, unless we focus more on men and their roles, we have come as far as we can go on the gender equality front (Gíslason & Holter 2007). Unless we manage to change the traditional division of labour in families and at home, further progress will be blocked in other areas as well. And unless we balance the distribution of parental leave and other care duties, the devaluing of women in the labour market will continue.

Nordic societies are all outspoken proponents of equality between women and men, and of the idea that it is natural that both genders share not only the same rights and obligations but also the same opportunities.

Officially, this has often been interpreted so that whenever the gender distribution in any particular area exceeds a 60/40 ratio, it means that one gender is not in reality enjoying the same opportunities as the other. This in turn translates to the assumption that, with the same background and opportunities, women and men would make similar choices. The basic view held is that gender differences in society are a result of social, not biological factors. All of the Nordic countries share similar views in this regard, and an organised system of gender equality co-operation has existed at least since 1987, which marked the establishment of the Nordic Council of Gender Equality Ministers. The work on behalf of gender equality has manifested, for example, in efforts to increase women's representation in politics, eliminate gender-bound educational choices, break the glass ceiling, and not least, modify the traditional family model so that each adult enjoys the same opportunities for gainful employment. Investing in kindergartens and public education forms one aspect of this; another consists of parental leave and various attempts to increase fathers' participation in the care of their children.

International rankings measuring gender equality mostly place the Nordic countries at the top. In 2009 and 2010, for example, the *World Economic Forum* ranked Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden in the top four positions and Denmark in seventh place (Hausman et al. 2010). This standing does not seem to have deterred economic opportunity: in those same years, the *World Economic Forum* also placed the Nordic countries at the top in terms of international competitiveness, with Sweden, Denmark and Finland as fourth, fifth and sixth, respectively, Norway as 14th and Iceland as 26th (Schwab 2009).

Historically speaking, families have for a long time evolved toward smaller and smaller units – starting from a time when an entire network of relatives was seen as one family, followed by the extended family, and arriving finally at the nuclear family. Today, separate family members are becoming more and more individualised – each person has his or her own room, with its own television and/or computer, and is able to live out a whole other life in cyberspace. This is in line with the overall individualisation that characterises the development of the Western world in the late-modern era. Traditional roles and ways of thinking have been uprooted in all areas of life (Castells 1997; Beck 1992; Giddens 1991, 1993). Even the physical basis for our existence, as either female or male, is no longer a given, but involves a choice. It is possible, after all, to change

one's gender if one is not happy with one's original gender, and whether one changes or decides to live with what one has, it is a choice that you may have to defend or legitimise. This increasingly pertains to the social roles stemming from the biological depiction of "male" or "female".

The table, below, is an attempt to summarise the changes that have taken place in recent decades and the areas of conflict that have ensued.

Change	Areas of conflict
Women as wage earners	Individualisation, children
Fathers' involvement in childcare	Working life, traditions
Collectivisation of childcare	Traditions, religion, parental authority
Parental leave	Individualisation, working life
Childcare allowance	Gender equality, the best interest of children

Paid work by women is not in and of itself a major subject of debate in the Nordic countries. It is seen as a given that each adult individual works to earn wages and thereby attains a degree of economic independence. This view is also in line with the general individualisation trend in society.

When it comes to fathers' participation in care giving, working life seems to have found it difficult to make the switch from a time when men were the wage earners and women were at home, to our present time, where both genders work outside the home (Holter 2003; Gíslason & Holter 2007; Puchert et al. 2005). Much still indicates that men continue to be seen as the ones to "shoulder their load" in a company's time of need, whereas women are considered more "unreliable", because they have to take care of the children and the home. The tradition of seeing mothers as the main caregivers of children continues to be strong, and many studies show that, although a lot has changed, a father in the primary care-giving role is still regarded with certain scepticism.

The collectivisation of childcare is a source of both ongoing and newly emerging conflict. There are those who believe – very strongly and vocally – that it is harmful for children to be placed in kindergarten, at least for the youngest ones, and that the time children spend there daily should be limited. At the same time, new kindergartens founded on religious principles are emerging, and society is faced with the dilemma of trying to respect parents' wishes while at the same time meeting children's needs for education and play, as well as their right to be raised with respect, in a manner that does not place them outside larger society.

Parental leave is in a pivotal position for a number of reasons. It is important for the health of both mother and child, it plays a significant role in the equality between women and men, and it is vital in the formation of a child's attachment to his or her parents. Most Nordic countries have moved towards greater individualisation in the use of parental leave, in other words, in the distribution of leave time between mother and father. The operative premise has been that parental leave is important for gender equality, but also significant has been the idea that children benefit from forming close attachments to both parents already at an early age. Some of the opposition to parental leave, however, has been vehement. The opposition is grounded mostly in the view that families have the right to self-determination and/or in the idea of a mother's fundamental importance for a child. The working world, too, appears to have had some trouble accepting that men too can prioritise their children and families for an extended period (Albrecht et al. 1999; Lammi-Taskula 2007).

All of the Nordic countries presently use various forms of childcare allowance, an issue that continues to provoke heated debate. Studies seem to show that the childcare allowance helps to cement traditional gender roles (Ch. 2). It is used primarily by mothers, which goes against the general development trend of advancing gender equality in families. On the contrary, say proponents, the allowance gives individuals greater freedom of choice and benefits children by making it possible for one parent to stay at home and care for them. This is a hotly debated claim, and research suggests that it is primarily the parents of society's most vulnerable children who make use of the benefit (Ch. 2). Presumably, these are the very children with the greatest need for participating in the activities that a kindergarten would provide.

The labour market

Even though the Nordic model has been relatively successful in advancing equality between women and men, there are still areas where the situation is distressingly bad. One of them is the gender pay gap. In this book, we do not spend a great deal of time discussing the labour market. However, it is true that if we were to place ourselves in the middle of a contemporary Nordic family and attempted to understand the key factors shaping that family's life and opportunities, the biggest single factor

would certainly be the labour market. The overarching issues are whether the parents have jobs, at what time they need to be there and at what time they can return home. These considerations determine everything else about the family's life, including childcare, free time and household work. Depending on social class, work can affect people's lives in various ways, but it always sets the framework for individual behaviour. To a large extent, this framework is connected to gender.

Perhaps more than other countries, the Nordic countries have used political measures to limit this effect and in part liberate individuals (and families) from the tyranny of working life. This has been done by using political measures against the market, to quote a well-known book (Esping-Andersen 1985). From regulating work time, unemployment benefits and health insurance, to parental leave, such measures have been designed in part to set people free from the labour market – to “decommodify” them. In spite of that, the demands of the labour market still largely determine the daily rhythm in a Nordic family.

To put it bluntly, we might say that the main conflict between working life and families is that working life wants people to adapt to its needs, whereas people want working life to adapt to their needs. The result, inevitably, is some type of compromise. First of all, working life needs a well-disciplined workforce of people who show up at work when they are supposed to and stay there for their fixed hours. Second, it needs employees who can be accommodating when extra work is needed. Conflicts emerge when the needs of families go up against the needs, rhythms and demands of working life.

During most of the 20th century, working life (as well as society itself) was organised as if everyone were “single”; whether a wage earner had a family or not was not something that was considered. The assumption was that if an individual decided to create a family, one of the partners (the woman) would stay at home to take care of the household while the other (the man) could dedicate himself wholly to being a wage earner and “providing for” the family. Most of the labour force consisted of men, young (unmarried) women and (older) women with grown children. Thus, one could argue that the conflict between working life and family mainly concerned men's wages, since women were performing the caregiving duties in families.

This all changed in the 1960s and 1970s. Married women (mothers) entered the labour market – at first, to work in part-time jobs or in jobs

that were compatible with family obligations. Simultaneously, there was a growing demand that society assume (partial) responsibility for childcare. School days were made longer and kindergartens proliferated. But the way that working life was organised did not change, or at least, changed very little and very late. To this day, most of working life is organised around the old principle of one wage-earning family member and one care-giving family member.

Standardised European surveys of gender-based wage differences (Eurostat) reveal that the Nordic countries are situated somewhere in the middle. In 2006, the average wage difference across 27 EU countries was 17.7%. In the Nordic countries, Finland had the biggest gap with 21.3%, then Iceland with 21%, Denmark with 17.6%, Sweden with 16.5%, and Norway with only 16% (Eurostat; Hagstofa Íslands 2010). But the bottom (or top) of the table features countries such as Turkey, Italy, Malta, Poland and Portugal. The explanation presumably lies in the proportion of employed women. For example, in Turkey only 45.9% women were active in the labour market in 2006, meaning that a significant proportion of women were working at home without compensation, engaged in classic care-giving activities – work that Nordic women are paid to do.

Two components seem to explain the greater part of the gender wage gap: the gender-segregation of the labour market and the unequal division of household and care work.

An analysis of women's opportunities in the labour market in 22 industrialised countries points to a certain paradox (Mandel & Semyonov 2006). In countries with a progressive welfare system, more women are active in the labour market, compared with countries with more liberally oriented policies. In the former, however, the labour market appears to be highly gender segregated, with women concentrated in traditional welfare jobs, mostly in the public sector, and their conspicuous absence from the labour market's top positions. In the other countries, this scenario is not as clear-cut. The study's authors offer the following conclusion:

"We contend that family-friendly policies and employment practices assume the primacy of women's familial responsibilities. As such, they are designed to allow women time off for the care of young children through extended maternity leaves and support of part-time employment. These policies, in turn, discourage employers from hiring women for managerial and powerful positions and foster women's attachment to female-typed occupations and jobs with convenient work conditions" (ibid. 1942).

Similar findings concerning “family-friendliness” have also been seen in other studies. It seems that much of family-friendliness is still about making it easier for women to combine (a certain amount of) labour market participation with familial responsibilities. Men – fathers – are mostly excluded from this equation, as their role is not seen as that of a family caregiver (Holt et al. 2006, 191–192; Puchert et al. (ed.) 2005; Langvasbråten & Teigen 2006). Another major reason behind wage differences is that women are more likely than men to be in charge of children and the home. Among other things, taking primary responsibility for household duties and childcare entails that women are not considered as capable as men of prioritising work and are therefore paid less. In order to be able to compete with men in the labour market under equal terms, women have to be liberated from familial responsibilities. But in order to do that, they must be on an equal footing in the labour market. As long as men earn, or have the chance of earning, more than women in the labour market, this factor will continue to carry weight when couples make decisions about the division of paid and unpaid labour. Many do not even bother to make such calculations, but simply accept that this is how it is and that it is better for the woman to assume a greater share of the unpaid work and for the man to prioritise paid work.

In recent years at least two major Nordic studies have examined the different effects that having children has on the lives of women and men, and the uneven distribution of parental leave as one of the main factors behind the income gap (SOU 2005; NOU 2008, 176–181). The extensive analysis of Norway showed that upwards of 40% of gender differences in hourly wages could be explained through children, i.e. that having children had a vastly different impact on women’s and men’s earnings in the labour market. Similar tendencies have been shown also in other Nordic countries. Helle Holt (2009) has pointed out that the gendered division of labour at home usually emerges when couples have children, and this division in turn explains a great deal of the gender-division of the labour market. Finally, a brand new study from Iceland should be mentioned here, showing that having children has a positive correlation with men’s earnings, but a negative one with women’s, and that the younger the children, the more negative the earnings impact on women (Hagstofa Íslands 2010a). The same phenomenon has been seen in Denmark, where

“Women and men who are in a partnership without children have the greatest likelihood of attaining a high labour market position, whereas in those partnerships with children the men’s chances are not affected while the effect on women is negative” (Holt 2006, 11).

Also deserving of attention is an excellent new anthology on wage differences in Denmark, including discussions of the interplay between the pay gap and the division of unpaid labour in the home, and the various aspects of this interaction. One of the authors concludes by saying that the problem of the pay gap is related to the “gender-based division of labour at home and cannot be resolved in isolation in the labour market, without taking into account what takes place within the family” (Deding, 2010, 115).

The significance of parental leave has also been analysed in other ways, lending support for the importance of how work is divided. For example, Johanna Lammi-Taskula points out, based on a Finnish study, that

“fathers who take parental leave make more compromises compared to other fathers. Not only have they reduced their contribution at work and worked part time more frequently, but they are also more likely to give up their job as a result of their family situation” (Lammi-Taskula 2007, 71).

One of three findings that seem to be consistent between different countries is that when it comes to wage differences, the differences are greater for those who are married and significantly lower for single people. The assumption is that this is due to the gender-based division of labour between spouses, to how paid and unpaid work is divided (Plantenga & Remery 2006, 11).

There are signs in all of the Nordic countries, however, that fatherhood is beginning to influence fathers’ participation in wage-earning more directly in that they are trying to increase their share of care responsibilities. But working life can be tough on them, and Johanna Lammi-Taskula sums up this situation well: “The image of the ideal male employee now has new nuances, but the demands for on-the-job performance have not diminished. After a few days’ or at most few weeks’ absence, the requirement is that one return to work” (Lammi-Taskula 2007, 73).

Another adjustment has occurred in unpaid household work. Time-use studies from Denmark, Norway and Sweden show that men now handle approximately 40% of unpaid work in the home (Lausten & Sjörup 2003; Statistics Sweden 2003; Vaage 2002). A much smaller (and different) Ice-

landic study yielded similar results among couples with children (Arnardóttir 2008).

The biggest difference between the genders within families appears to be in how parental leave is divided, but even there the trend in all of the Nordic countries is toward distribution that is more equal. The highest level of equality is seen in countries that have partially individualised the leave system (Haataja 2009).

Why are we not seeing similar statistics on the pay gap between women and men? Why, on the contrary, does it seem that the more equal division of household work and childcare in Nordic families has coincided with stagnation when it comes to wage differences? In Norway, there was a “dramatic reduction in average wage differences between women and men up to the mid-1980s, followed by an extended period of levelling out. In the 2000s we see again a tendency toward a recovery for women, but at a much slower tempo than before” (NOU 2008:6). A similar development can be seen in Iceland, where the pay gap shrank in the early 1980s, then stalled until the late 1990s, and thereafter strongly declined until 2003, when it again stalled (based on my own, unpublished calculations).

A possible explanation is that we are faced with a “delayed reaction” and that working life has simply not had time yet to grasp all the changes, continuing to behave as if families still consisted of “the provider” and the stay-at-home spouse. However, studies do not lend support to this idea (NOU 2008:6, 60–63). It does seem possible, however, that there is a delay, but that the changes are so new that they are not yet visible in studies. In other words, women’s education revolution, for example, is so recent that it has not yet made a strong mark on the labour market.

One might also think that the changes in the division of household work are more statistical than real; i.e. that if men are indeed assuming a much bigger share of housework than before, their contributions are still adapted to the needs of working life. Perhaps men take over the part of household work that can be done “when it’s suitable”, while women are still much more likely to take care of the household work that cannot be postponed, for example having to do with school or kindergarten. Precisely this appears to be the situation in Denmark (Lausten & Sjørup, 2003).

A third explanation is that we have simply reached a limit, and that the private marketplace devalues women by about 10% just for being women. Even then, however, this must be connected to something besides a lack of preference for women. It is difficult to find any other explanation besides

the particular capacity that women have – giving birth to children and the social consequences of that fact.

Whatever the case, it is obvious that a solution is unthinkable without a gender balance in household responsibilities, including childcare. With that in mind, the contributions in this book are intended to further our understanding of how we can advance in our efforts to eliminate wage differences.

The intention is not, however, to claim that the division of household labour and childcare are the sole causes of the income gap. Equality within families represents one necessary part in the effort to eliminate the pay gap, but alone it is not enough. The other major obstacle continues to be our gender-segregated labour market, and the generally inflexible structures that prevail in the labour market and within companies, an example of which is (informal) male networking that excludes women. Yet it is quite possible that more fathers showing up at the nearby childcare centre will help to change the traditional image of feminine and masculine, with the effect that more men will seek out traditionally female occupations and thus disrupt the gender-segregated labour market.

The contributions in this book

Parental insurance

The development of parental insurance was undertaken in the Nordic countries to solve the care-giving dilemma from a gender equality standpoint, by trying to encourage parents to share the leave available to them. The idea is that if both mother and father are at home during a child's first months of life, this will eliminate the discrimination of women in working life, or at least deter it, since both parents are absent from work for a certain period following the birth of a child. It is also meant to convey that the responsibility for childcare should be divided more equally even after parental leave has ended. The idea is that an equal parental distribution of care giving at the start of a child's life would continue, for several reasons (father's self-confidence, mother's trust in his abilities, the care giving gives fathers an appetite for more, and so on). All of the Nordic countries have adopted one type of initiative or another to encourage parents to divide their parental leave more equally. A long-term glance does indeed

show that leave is now divided more evenly, but the situation is far from parents sharing the leave on terms that are anywhere near equal. The reason is hotly contested, with some claiming that that fathers don't want this, or that various financial reasons compel couples to decide that it is better if the mother uses most of the parental leave, or that it is mothers who don't want to share the leave.

In Chapter 1, Ann-Zofie Duvander and Johanna Lammi-Taskula discuss the development of the parental leave system in the Nordic countries. They point out that even though, superficially, the development may seem to have followed the same direction in all of the Nordic countries, there are in fact differences that are worth examining. Some Nordic countries, for example, have fashioned the leave system from a gender-neutral standpoint, while others assign separate forms of leave for women and men. The chapter considers the historical development of the leave system and follows this with a discussion of the status of the various leave systems today.

The question of how parental leave is actually used and divided between mothers and fathers is an extremely important one, not least from the standpoint of gender equality. According to Duvander and Lammi-Taskula, it may be difficult to compare the different countries because each one operates by a different set of rules. The authors do, however, conduct a comparison and discuss the factors that may influence the use of parental leave in its various forms. They also highlight the fact that Nordic statistics on leave use should be considerably improved in a number of different areas, in order to render them more comparable.

The authors conclude by iterating that parental leave use by fathers has become the norm in the Nordic countries, but that laws and rules largely determine how the leave can be used and what gender equality impact it may have.

Policy

One of the defining characteristics of the Nordic childcare system is that it is universal in that it covers everyone, not only those with the greatest need. It is an example of the Nordic societies' attempt to liberate people from the labour market in certain ways, to enable everyone to live a relatively high-quality life regardless of their labour market attachment. It is

something that the state enjoins on the caregiver, but its concrete formulation can vary between different countries and also within each country.

Another characteristic of the Nordic system of childcare is the close relationship between caring and education. In that regard, the countries differ quite a bit. Some view kindergarten as a child's first school, and hence they are under the supervision of the department of education. Others see kindergartens as something other than schools, and part of another type of department.

Politics is one thing and policy is quite another. In Chapter 2, Guðný Björk Eydal and Tine Rostgaard discuss how childcare policy is created in the Nordic countries and, not least, how it can differ from one case to another, and from one municipality to the next.

The chapter offers a historical survey of the legislative changes and describes the current state of the legislation in a number of areas, including organisation, financing, rights and quality. In each area, Nordic practices are compared with those that are characteristic of the EU as a whole.

Following this survey Eydal and Rostgaard turn their gaze to the development of childcare allowances, which in many ways can be seen as an anomaly within the Nordic model. Eydal and Rostgaard analyse the origins of the childcare allowance and illustrate the different conditions prevailing in each country when their version of the childcare allowance was first introduced. The authors also discuss the different formulations and how the right to childcare allowance, its amount and the entitlement period can vary dramatically from country to country, and also within countries. In conclusion, Eydal and Rostgaard point out that in many ways, the childcare allowance is in direct opposition to what has thus far characterised the Nordic model, for example with regard to universalism and, just as importantly, when it comes to the emphasis on families that share paid work, household work and care giving. In this regard, the childcare allowance must be seen as a threat to gender equality work in the Nordic countries.

Children

Occasionally, in the course of debating gender equality, there is the accusation that we tend to forget about the children. That society, in its eagerness to achieve gender equality between women and men, sometimes forgets the fundamental idea that what is best for children should be of

paramount importance when it comes to measures that affect children. (This is, of course, a rather problematic concept; what measures will *not* eventually, one way or another, have some kind of effect on children?) The crux of the issue here seems to be that since gender equality work has largely focused on equality in working life, children have been set aside. Since the labour market obviously discriminates against women, largely on the grounds that they give birth to children and are generally children's primary caregivers within families, the main focus has been to lay down tracks for women in working life by investing in kindergartens. The result is that an ever-greater share of each successive generation begins kindergarten at an earlier and earlier age, instead of being at home with parents, i.e. a mother. It has also been noted that children are spending more and more time per day in kindergarten care. Critics claim that this is not in the best interest of children and that, on the contrary, small children need the peace, safety and continuity that only their own parents can provide. We are therefore faced with a choice between either advancing equality between women and men or doing what is the best interest of children. To do both is seen as impossible.

On the other side, some point out that it is hardly in the best interest of children to grow up in a society that discriminates based on gender. That only a society hostile to children, especially to girls, would teach children that society values women and men differently and that they serve different functions. Besides, it is also in a child's interest to grow up with a close connection to both parents, something that would not be possible were we to return to a traditional societal division of labour between women and men, with women as "housewives" and men as "providers". It also would not work, since women are not interested in that role (neither, perhaps, are men). This context also brings up the question of fertility rates, and the need of working life to be supplied with a well-educated workforce. It seems obvious that one of the main reasons for the relatively high (and growing) fertility rate in the Nordic countries, in a European comparison, are the investments made in gender equality and the fairly well-functioning welfare state, including such things as kindergartens that are reasonably affordable for parents. In 2008, birth rates in the Nordic countries ranged from 1.84 children per woman in Finland to 2.14 in Iceland (Nordic Statistical Yearbook 2009, 38) whereas the EU average in 2006 was 1.53. The employment sector also has a strong need of female workforce, because on average, women today are better educated than

men. In order to make the equation of a (relatively) high birth rate plus a high level of labour market participation to work, we need societal solutions for childcare. Finally, references are made to studies that appear to lend support to the idea that equality between parents has a favourable impact on child development (cf. Holter et. al. 2009).

In Chapter 3, Berit Brandth and Ingólfur V. Gíslason evaluate research for findings about the effects of parental leave and kindergartens on Nordic children. The authors point out, among other things, that societal measures to ensure that children's needs are being met have long formed an important part of the Nordic model. This is manifested in each Nordic country's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the special ombudsmen for children's affairs in each country, prohibitions against corporal punishment in child rearing and investments into equalising social differences through kindergartens. In light of the authors' survey of research in this field, we may not have to worry too much about how Nordic children are doing. In international comparisons, Nordic children are usually at the top, both in terms of skills and preparedness as well as physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Part of the efforts to boost gender equality in recent decades has been to encourage parents to share their parental leave and in other ways, too, to promote a new kind of role for fathers. The chapter therefore features a discussion of the significance of fathers in children's development. A growing number of published studies and reports show fathers' active participation in childcare has a positive effect on children's cognitive and emotional development and overall wellbeing. Measures that promote gender equality and contribute to fathers' ability to participate actively in their children's care are therefore measures that also benefit children.

Finally, the authors review research particularly on the role of kindergarten for children; whether there is a particular age at which children are mature enough to participate in kindergarten activities; and whether there is a maximum daily limit to how long they should spend in kindergarten. Overall, kindergartens appear to have a positive effect on children's development and life opportunities. The authors note that, considering the significant changes that have taken place in children's care in their first years of life, it is surprising how little research has been directed at how children are doing in kindergartens. The expansion of the kindergarten system has occurred rather rapidly, and research is needed to identify the aspects that are beneficial, or possibly neutral or perhaps even harmful for children.

Politics

Although politics, including traditional “right” and “left” values, clearly plays a role in the shaping of policies in all of the areas discussed here, it is interesting to note, for example, that in Iceland a centre-right government brought about a quite radical change toward the individualisation of parental leave. A centre-right government in Denmark did the exact opposite, i.e. abolished the division between mother and father so that each family can “freely” choose which of its members uses the leave. In Denmark, then, the family is the operative unit, while Iceland now largely considers the individual the starting point. Political parties with Christian ideologies tend to be conservative in this area and to promote traditional family values, which stipulate that children should be at home. Hence, these parties have supported parental leave being a family’s right, not an individual’s, as well as some form of support/compensation for parents who stay at home to care for their children. In the case of other political parties, the picture is not as clear. Left-leaning parties that have traditionally spoken out on behalf of collectivism tend to support individual-based rights in this area, out of the conviction that this contributes to greater equality between the genders. Right-wing parties are perhaps even more ambivalent. Tradition requires that they support the provider-model, but that does not really work today. Besides, they are traditionally opposed to “general” rights, but can go along with rights that are based on “need”. Neoliberals are (must be?) generally against all forms of paid parental leave, except when agreed upon through an individual negotiation between employer and employee. So if the right already exists, they should support individualisation. However, theory and practice is not always the same thing!

The growing interest in fathers as their children’s caregivers and the initiatives supporting this can be seen in a number of different ways. First of all, it is about growing individualisation, where society’s support is doled out to individuals instead of groups (here, families). On the other hand, it concerns a broader investment in changing traditional gender roles so that neither women nor men feel restricted by their biological sex to behave in a particular way in certain social situations, i.e. a continuation of individualisation and the struggle against being bound by tradition. Third, it is about the needs of the employment sector. One of the reasons for the general level of wellbeing in the Nordic countries is that women participate so actively in the labour market. This participation has gradu-

ally taken on an even greater meaning in that women's education has increased to the point that it has surpassed that of men's. Presumably, companies would have no objection to an upheaval of the traditional gender roles, wherein men would assume primary responsibility for the home and for childcare, while women would devote themselves to paid work. Fourth, it is also about a gradual re-evaluation of old conceptions of what is "in the best interest of children". This re-evaluation means leaving behind ideas about the fundamental and essential relationship between mother and child, and also a re-evaluation of ideas according to which children are capable of only one close social relationship.

In Chapter 4, Guðný Björk Eydal and Tine Rostgaard analyse and discuss care policies in particular. Why does Nordic care policy look the way it does? And did every Nordic country follow the same road? This chapter shows that many different political actors have participated in the formation of existing care policies, and a broad spectrum of social actors continue to pull policy in different directions and to influence political decision-making.

Eydal and Rostgaard show that it is simply not true that political ideologies are the only factors that matter when making decisions about care policy. Left or right is not in and of itself decisive when hammering out care policy outlines, even though certain tendencies are clearly present. We must therefore look at other societal factors in order to understand the reasons for why care policies look the way they do in the different Nordic countries.

Finally, Eydal and Rostgaard consider the meaning of care policy for the Nordic welfare model as a whole. They conclude by pointing out that it has been the cornerstone of the Nordic welfare model that both parents are employed and that both take care of their children and their home. To move away from this basic pillar would spell an end to the Nordic welfare model.

In sum, the contributions in this book offer a broad survey of Nordic developments in the fields of childcare policy and parental insurance, and research into the wellbeing of children. The discussions and findings develop these areas in relation to the Nordic countries' explicitly stated ambitions of achieving equality between women and men. These writings are therefore an important contribution to discussions about the future of the Nordic model.

References

- Albrecht, J. W., Edin, P-A., Sundström, M. & Vroman, S. B. (1999). Career Interruptions and Subsequent Earnings: A Reexamination Using Swedish Data. *Journal of Human Resources*, 34, 294–311.
- Arnardóttir, Auður Arna. (2008). Fæðingarorlof frá sjónarhóli feðra og mæðra. In: Gunnar Þór Jóhannesson & Helga Björnsdóttir (eds.). *Rannsóknir í félagsvísindum IX*. (pp. 139–150). Reykjavík: Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands.
- Castells, M. (1997). *The Power of Identity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage.
- Deding, M. (2010). Könsarbejdsdeling i familien og ligeløn. In: Mette Deding & Helle Holt (eds.). *Hvorfor har vi løn-forskelle mellem kvinder og mænd? En antologi om ligeløn i Danmark*. (pp. 99–116). København: SFI.
- Esping Andersen, G. (1985). *Politics against Markets. The Social Democratic Road to Power*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Eurostat. Gender pay gap in unadjusted form. Downloaded from http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/labour_market/earnings/main_tables
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Giddens, A. (1993). *The Transformation of Intimacy: Love, Sexuality and Eroticism in modern Societies*. Cambridge. Polity.
- Gíslason, Ingólfur & Øystein Gullvåg Holter (2007). Vælfærdsstat i kønssklæmma: kön, ekonomi och livskvalitet. In: Holter, Ø. G. (ed.). *Män i rörelse. Jämställdhet, förändring och social innovation i Norden*. (p. 22–61). Riga: Gidlunds förlag.
- Haataja, Anita (2009). *Fathers' use of paternity and parental leave in the Nordic countries*. Helsinki: The Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela).
- Hagstofa Íslands (2010). *Evrópskur samanburður á launum árið 2006*. <https://hagstofa.is/lisalib/getfile.aspx?ItemID=10687>
- Hagstofa Íslands (2010a). *Launamunur kynjanna á almennum vinnumarkaði 2000–2007*. <https://hagstofa.is/lisalib/getfile.aspx?ItemID=10723>
- Hausman, R., Tyson L. D., Zahidi, S. (2010). *Global Gender Gap Report*. <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/report2010.pdf>
- Holt, H., Geerdsen L. P., Christensen G., Klitgaard C., Lind, M. L. (2006). *Det kønsopdelte arbejdsmarked. En kvantitativ og kvalitativ belysning*. København: Socialforskningsinstituttet.
- Holter, Ø. G. (2003). *Can men do it? Men and Gender Equality – The Nordic Experience*. Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Holter, Ø. G., Svare, H. & Egeland C. (2009). *Gender Equality and Quality of Life. A Norwegian Perspective*. Oslo: Nordisk Institut för Kunskap om Kön.
- Lammi-Taskula, J. (2007). Faderskap på arbetsplatsen. In: Holter, Ø. G. (ed.). *Män i rörelse. Jämställdhet, förändring och social innovation i Norden*. Riga: Gidlunds förlag.
- Langvasbråten, T. & Teigen M. (2006). *Focus. Fostering Caring Masculinities. The European Dimension*. Oslo: Institute for Social Research.
- Lausten, M. & Sjørup, K. (2003). *Hvad kvinder og mænd bruger tiden til. Om tidsmæssig ligestilling i danske familier*. København: Socialforskningsinstituttet.

- Mandel, H. & Semyonov, M. (2006). A Welfare State Paradox: State Interventions and Women's Employment Opportunities in 22 Countries. *American Journal of Sociology*, 111(6):1910–1949.
- Nielsen, A. A. & Christoffersen M. N. (2009). *Børnehavens betydning for børns udvikling*. København: SFI – Det Nationale Forskningscenter for Velfærd
- Nordic Statistical Yearbook 2009. <http://www.norden.org/en/publications/publications/2009-001/population-befolkning>
- NOU (2008). *Kjønn og lønn Fakta, analyser og virkemidler for likelønn*. Oslo: Norges offentlige utredninger 2008:6.
- Plantenga, J. & Remery C. (2006). *The gender pay gap. Origins and policy responses. A comparative review of thirty European countries*. Report prepared for the Equality Unit, European Commission.
- Puchert, R., Gärtner, M. & Höyng S. (eds.) (2005). *Work Changes Gender. Men and Equality in the Transition of Labour Forms*. Verlag Barbara Budrich: Leverkusen-Opladen.
- Schwab, K. (2009). *The Global Competitiveness Report 2009–2010*. <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/GCR09/GCR20092010fullreport.pdf>
- SOU (2005). *Reformerad föräldraförsäkring. Betänkande av Föräldraförsäkringsutredningen*. Statens offentliga utredningar 2005:73: Stockholm.
- Statistiska centralbyrån (2003). *Tid för vardagsliv. Kvinnors och mäns tidsanvändning 1990/91 och 2000/01*. Stockholm: Statistiska centralbyrån.
- Vaage, O. F. (2002). *Til alle døgnets tider. Tidsbruk 1971–2000*. Oslo: Statistisk sentralbyrå.
- Westlund, J. (ed.) 2009. *Regnbågsfamiljers ställning i Norden. Politik, rättigheter och villkor*. Oslo: Nordisk Institut för Kunskap om Kön.

1. Parental leave

Ann-Zofie Duvander and Johanna Lammi-Taskula

In practice, parental leave can mean many different types of leave from employment outside the home, to which parents are entitled in order to care for their children. According to Peter Moss (2009), maternity leave, paternity leave and parental leave are the most common types of leave (see Table 1 for the terms used in the different Nordic countries).

Table 1. Leave terminology by country

	Maternity leave	Paternity leave	Parental leave
Denmark	Graviditetsorlov/Barselorlov	Fædreorlov	Forældreorlov
Finland	Äitiysvapaa/Moderskapsledighet	Isyysvapaa Faderskapsledighet	Vanhempainvapaa Föräldraledighet
Iceland	Faedingarorlof	Faedingarorlof /Fedraorlof	Faedingarorlof
Norway	Svangerskapspermisjon Fødselspermisjon	Pappapermisjon	Foreldrepengeperioden
Sweden	Havandeskapsledighet	Pappadagar	Föräldraledighet

Maternity leave is reserved for mothers and paternity leave for fathers, whereas parental leave can be used by both. The motivation for maternity leave is usually related to health, with the aim of protecting the health of the mother and the newborn child. Paternity leave is often taken upon the birth of a child, with the aim of enabling parents, the newborn and possible siblings to spend time together. Parental leave makes it possible for one parent to take time off from work to care for a child. It can be an individual, non-transferable right, with certain time periods allotted to each parent, or it can be a family-based right to leave which parents can decide to share in the manner most suitable to them. A father's/mother's quota means that part of the leave is reserved exclusively for the father or mother; it is non-transferable, i.e. it cannot be used by the other parent (Moss 2009).

In Sweden and Iceland, a leading principle in leave policy is gender neutrality. On the one hand, both parents have symmetrical, individual rights that are gender based, and on the other hand, all concepts referring to a specific gender (“mother”, “father”) have been largely replaced in legislation with gender-neutral terms (“parents”). Finland, Denmark and Norway still have separate types of leave for mothers and fathers. All of the countries offer some freedom of choice in how to divide part of the leave, but Iceland, Norway and Sweden reserve some of the leave for either parent. Expanding the definition of “mother” and “father” to non-biological parents has made it possible to advance equality between different types of families.

In all of the Nordic countries, parents who make use of maternity, paternity or parental leave receive a relatively high compensation for loss of income during leave. In certain countries mothers and fathers can stay at home even after the end of the parental leave period by going on childcare leave (on a childcare allowance) which carries a lower compensation – usually as an alternative to subsidised childcare outside the home (see Eydal & Rostgaard in this book).

In comparative studies on welfare states, the Nordic countries have been distinguished as “defamilising” because families with children are given more income transfers and services than in many other countries, in order to support parents in their effort to combine work and childcare (Esping-Andersen 1990). The Nordic family model has been characterised by both parents’ shared responsibility to provide for the family and participate in childcare, and during the 2000s, many other countries have developed their family policies in this direction (Leira 2006).

At the same time, there is considerable variation between the different Nordic countries. In a comparison of 19 European nations, studying leave duration, level of compensation and division of the leave between mothers and fathers, Karin Wall places Finland and Norway in a different category from Sweden, Denmark and Iceland (Wall 2007). Wall describes the leave model in the latter three countries, and in Slovenia, as “one year leave gender equality orientated policy model” – even though the leave period in Iceland is actually less than one year. For Finland and Norway, which are in the same category with France and Belgium, the model is described as a “parental choice orientated policy model”.

When evaluating so-called effective parental leave (length of leave multiplied by level of compensation), Norway is the leader in the Nordic region

and also in the world, according to a 2008 report published by UNICEF. Finland comes in second place among the Nordic countries (sixth worldwide, after Norway, France, Hungary, Slovenia and Germany), and the rest of the Nordic countries are included in the top-11 nations in the world (Denmark is No. 7, Sweden No. 8 and Iceland No. 11).

In order to portray the differences and similarities in the parental leave policies of the Nordic countries, we will first in this chapter examine the historical development of the leave system. After that, we will introduce the existing leave systems in Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Finally, we will describe how mothers and fathers have used parental leave in the Nordic countries and discuss research that explores the factors influencing leave use. A conclusion section will complete the chapter.

1.1 History of the development of the Nordic leave system

The protection of motherhood in working life has a long history in the Nordic countries (Table 2). Legislation concerning pregnant women's employment has existed in Norway for over 100 years. Maternity leave following the birth of a child has been part of Nordic legislation for over 50 years. The challenge of combining motherhood and paid work has, in other words, been recognised and addressed, and solutions have been sought to protect the health and wellbeing of both mother and child. Of equal importance has been providing women with the opportunity to earn a living and be able to care for their children.

Fathers' right to leave only began to be developed in the 1970s, when parental leave for both parents was introduced for the first time in the world, in Sweden, in 1974. The other Nordic countries have subsequently introduced varying forms of paternity leave. Norway and Finland quickly followed Sweden's example, but at first gave fathers the right to paternity leave and later to parental leave. The logic behind paternity leave is to bolster the father-child relationship and to help a mother who has just given birth, whereas parental leave is more explicitly connected to gender equality and shared care responsibility. The most explicit gender equality measure introduced within leave reform is the father's quota, brought out in Norway and Sweden in the mid-1990s. The quota means that part of the leave is reserved exclusively for the father and that it cannot be used by

the mother. Denmark soon followed suit, but there, the father's quota was rejected after a few years when a new, conservative government introduced a longer leave without quotas, which the government saw as meddling in the private lives of families (Borchorst 2006). With its 3+3+3 model of parental leave, instituted in 2003, Iceland became the leading country in the strive for equality by giving mothers and fathers a three-month quota each. That same year, Finland introduced its own version of the father's quota.

Table 2. Introduction of the different forms of leave (years)

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
First maternal protection legislation	1901	1917	1946	1892	1900
Maternity leave	1960	1964	1946	1956	1955
Paternity leave	1984	1978	1998	1977	1980
Parental leave	1984	1985	1981	1978	1974
Father's quota	1997 ¹	2003	2001	1993	1995

(Valdimarsdóttir 2006)

1.2 The leave system in 2010²

A comparative analysis of the right to leave in the Nordic countries yields different results, depending on which aspects are compared. If we look at the length of parental leave with compensation tied to income (Table 3), and focus on gender-specific periods, the period reserved for the mother is longest in Finland and Denmark (4/4.5 months of maternity leave before and after birth). The period reserved for fathers is longest in Iceland (three months parental leave assigned as father's quota). If we look at the period that an individual parent is able to take (Fig. 1), Sweden offers the longest period: joint-parental leave, together with specific mother or father quota, comes to over one year (60 weeks). In Denmark, the period is nearly as long (50/58 weeks), in Norway and Finland slightly less than a year (47/46 weeks) and in Iceland, the total shared parental leave together

¹ Abolished in 2002; father's quota re-introduced in the industrial sector.

² Much of the information is derived from the national reports in Moss (2009): Denmark/Rostgaard; Finland/Salmi & Lammi-Taskula; Iceland/Einarsdóttir & Pétursdóttir; Norway/Brandth & Kvande; Sweden/ Haas, Chronholm, Duvander & Hwang.

er with a mother or father quota, comes to six months (26 weeks) for an individual mother or father. If we look at it from the child's perspective, the period with income-related compensation is longer in all countries that feature a period that is reserved for an individual parent, as long as the parents are not on leave simultaneously – for example in Sweden, shared parental leave plus mother's quota plus father's quota comes to a total of 68.5 weeks.

Table 3. Leave length with income-related compensation in 2010 (weeks)

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
Maternity leave	18	17.5	(2) ³	-	(2) ⁴
Paternity leave	2 ⁵	3	-	2 ⁶	2 ⁷
Shared parental leave	32/40 ⁸	26.5	12	27/37 ⁹	51.5 ¹⁰
Father's quota	(3 ¹¹)	5 ¹²	12	10	8.5
Mother's quota	-	-	11	9 ¹³	8.5

³ Obligatory leave after birth.

⁴ Obligatory leave before or after birth, with or without compensation.

⁵ Six weeks in the public sector.

⁶ As of July 1, 2011, the father's quota in Norway has been extended to 12 weeks.

⁷ Five days of father's quota = a week.

⁸ With full compensation/reduced reimbursement.

⁹ With 100% or 80% reimbursement.

¹⁰ 390 days (seven days = a week). To this, in certain municipalities, can be added the opportunity to receive a childcare allowance until the child turns three. Municipalities can themselves decide whether they wish to provide childcare allowances, and generally, conservative-led municipalities have done so.

¹¹ In the industrial sector.

¹² The father receives five bonus weeks if he uses two weeks of the shared portion of parental leave.

¹³ One might as well call at least six of these weeks "maternity leave", because the mother is not allowed to work.

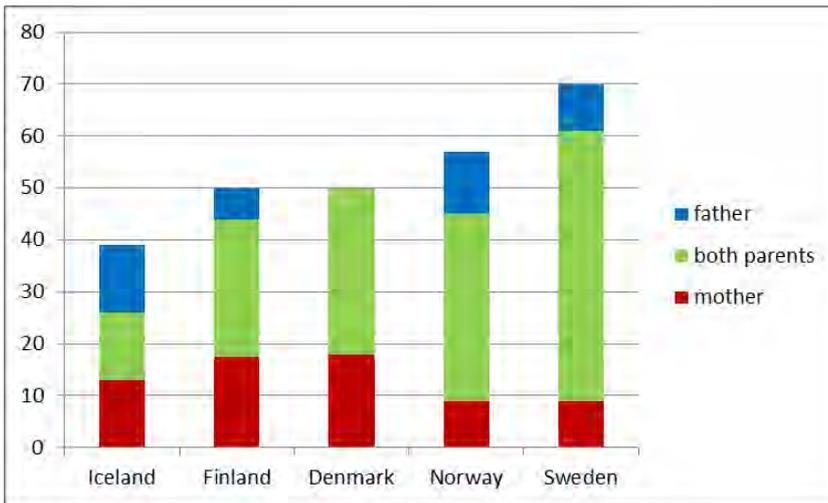


Figure 1. Parental leave length in the Nordic countries in 2010 (number of weeks on income-related compensation).

If we include leave periods compensated at a low, flat rate or with no compensation (Fig. 2), and look at how long a child can stay at home with a parent, Finland and Norway lead in a comparison of leave length. In both countries, it is possible to take leave from work at a low reimbursement until the child turns three (see Eydal & Rostgaard in this book). The same is true of Sweden, where certain municipalities pay childcare allowances.

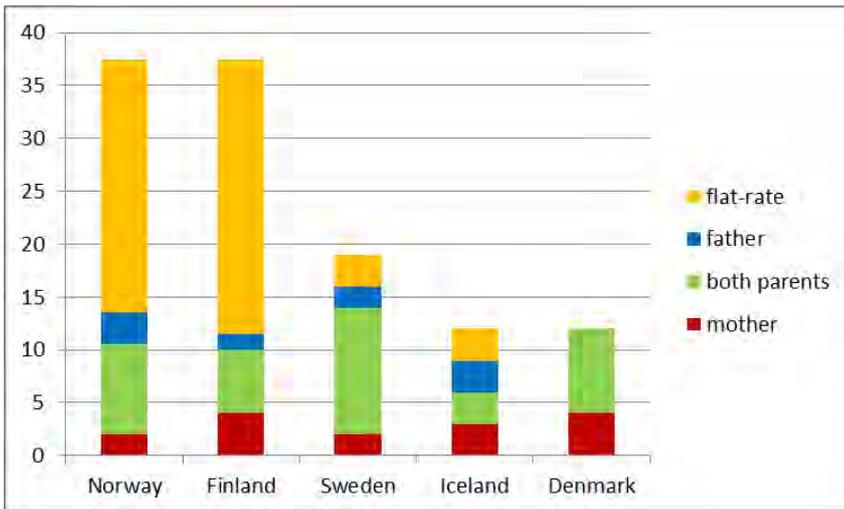


Figure 2. Length of childcare leave in the Nordic countries (number of months on income-related, flat rate, or no compensation).

1.2.1 Maternity leave

Even though the history of maternity leave goes back a long way in all Nordic countries, there are differences in terms of one's right to it. The length of maternity leave varies, and entitlement criteria are different in each country.

Denmark and Finland have the longest leave period reserved for mothers. Both countries have a maternity leave of approximately four months (see Table 3), of which about one month is for use before birth. In Finland, maternity leave can be transferred to the child's father, if the mother is unable to care for the child for health reasons.

Iceland, Norway and Sweden have no leave period explicitly defined as 'maternity leave'. In all three countries there are norms surrounding the protection of motherhood, which could be considered maternity leave. Norway and Sweden have a leave period for pregnant women and/or mothers who have just given birth. In Norway, three weeks before and six weeks following childbirth of parental leave are reserved for mothers. In Sweden, mothers must take two weeks of obligatory leave during the 14-week period between seven weeks prior and seven weeks after childbirth; mothers can decide if they want the parental allowance during this time. Pregnant women employed in high-risk professions are entitled to 50 extra days of leave. In Iceland, three out of the nine-month-long parental leave package is reserved for the mother, and one month of it can be used before childbirth. A woman may not return to work until two weeks following childbirth. Maternity leave can be extended by two months if the mother suffers from complications during or after childbirth.

1.2.2 Paternity leave

Paternity leave taken at the same time as the mother is on maternity leave or parental leave is an individual right in all Nordic countries except Iceland. The length of paternity leave is two weeks in Sweden, Norway and Denmark and three weeks in Finland. Iceland reserves a leave period specifically for fathers, i.e. three months of parental leave that can be taken at the same time as the mother's leave (see Table 2 and the section on quotas).

In Denmark, paternity leave must be used within 14 weeks of childbirth. Swedish fathers can go on paternity leave within the first two months of the child's life. Finnish fathers can use their paternity leave in

one to four increments in the course of the mother's maternity and parental leave period (9–10 months).

1.2.3 Parental leave

Parents in all of the Nordic countries can divide certain portions of parental leave amongst themselves. They can negotiate and decide how to split the transferable part of the leave. The length of the shared portion varies from three months in Iceland to one year in Sweden.

In principle, the intention behind "separate" parental leave has been that each parent in turn is able to stay at home to care for the child, while the other works or studies outside the home. In other words, the idea is that once the mother returns to work, the father goes on leave and takes charge of childcare. In practise, however, it is possible and quite common that a mother stays at home while the father is on his portion of leave (Rostgaard 2002, Haataja 2004; Salmi, Lammi-Taskula & Närvi 2009). She may, for example, use vacation days, study part time or be unemployed. In addition, in Iceland it is possible for both parents to take their parental leave concurrently.

1.2.4 Quotas

All of the Nordic countries have tried to attain a more equal distribution of leave by encouraging its use among fathers. In Sweden, Norway and Iceland the gender-neutral principle has also meant the introduction of quotas not only for fathers but also for mothers.

A parental leave quota is a non-transferable leave, meaning that only one parent is able to take advantage of it. If he or she does not use the leave quota, it cannot be transferred to the other parent, in the way that a shared portion of leave can be transferred. The fact that quotas exist for both mothers and fathers indicates that parents are seen as equal caregivers to the child they have together, and that both are given the opportunity to serve as the main caregiver during the quota period, even if the other parent will perhaps end up using a greater share of parental leave overall.

Especially the father's quota is a challenge to the traditional division of labour in families, with the responsibility for care giving transferred from the mother to the father. The decision whether to share parental leave between the parents is no longer only a private decision made by a family.

Norway was the first country in the world to introduce the father's quota in 1993, followed by Sweden and Denmark several years later (Table 2). In 2002, Denmark annulled the two-week father quota, while Sweden extended the father quota from one to two months. In Norway, the quota month (a one-month quota for both fathers and mothers) has also been extended: first, it was extended to six weeks, and in 2009, to ten weeks. Iceland and Finland introduced quotas in the early 2000s. In Iceland, the father's quota was initially one month, then two months, and since 2003, three months. Icelandic mothers obtained their three-month quota already in 2001.

Finland only has a parental leave quota for fathers, unless the four months of maternity leave can be seen as a mother's quota. A father is entitled to bonus leave, if he uses two weeks of the shared parental leave period. First, two bonus weeks were introduced, and in 2010, fathers received two more bonus weeks, so that the length of the "father's month" is now six weeks.¹⁴

1.2.5 *Who is entitled to leave?*

There are differences between the Nordic countries in that the right to leave can be based on living situation – one has to either live with the child/the child's mother or/and one has to have lived in the country in question for a certain period – or employment (see Table 4).

In Finland, the right to maternity, paternity and parental leave is based on living arrangements. All women residing in Finland for at least 180 days before estimated delivery date are entitled to maternity allowance and maternity leave. Finnish fathers are entitled to paternity leave and parental leave as long as they live with the mother of the child in an established partnership.

In Sweden, a residency-based right – residing in the country in question – also applies to fathers' right to a parental allowance. Someone without custody of a child is not entitled to parental allowance. In Denmark, in order to qualify for leave the father has to have established fatherhood and live

¹⁴ In 2011 the father's quota was extended to 12 weeks.

with the child during the leave period. Icelandic parents without custody can take parental leave with the permission of the parent who has custody.

In Denmark, Norway and Iceland, the right to compensation during maternity and/or parental leave is connected to employment. In Iceland, all parents who have been active in the labour market for six months prior to the birth of the child are entitled to compensation from the parents' fund during leave, and those who are not active or whose work constitutes less than 25% of full-time employment, receive a fixed sum. The sum is higher for parents who are students, compared to those who are unemployed.

In Sweden, one must have worked for 240 days in order to be eligible for income-related compensation. Paternity leave (but not a father's use of parental leave) is employment based: all working fathers are entitled to two weeks of paternity leave.

A Danish woman is entitled to maternity allowance and maternity leave as long as she has worked as an employee for at least 120 hours in the 13 weeks preceding her leave, or, if she is an entrepreneur, she has worked at least six months out of the last 12 months. Students, too, can be eligible for maternity allowance if they have completed vocational training that lasted at least 18 months or was part of their education. Unemployed women can receive unemployment compensation during leave and students can receive study allowances instead of a maternity allowance; women who have received sickness benefits prior to giving birth continue to receive the same compensation during their maternity leave.

In Norway, all parents active in the labour market and earning pension/generating income for at least six months out of the last ten months preceding the leave period are entitled to parental allowance. Previously (before 2000), a father's possibility of taking parental leave was dependent on both his and the mother's employment; both were required to have worked at least six of the previous ten months. Now, fathers in Norway are entitled to parental leave even if the child's mother was not employed prior to the child being born. The father's parental leave nevertheless continues to be related to what the mother does following childbirth: she has to work at least 75% of the time or be a full-time student in an officially recognised course of study – for example take part in a Norwegian course – for him to be able to use the shared portion of parental leave. Since 2009, the right to use the father's quota is no longer tied to the mother's right to compensation, and after July 1, 2010, fathers have been able to use their quotas even when a mother has remained at home.

Table 4. Entitlement to compensation during parental leave

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
Maternity leave	Must work at least 120 hours over 13 weeks; entrepreneurs must work at least six of the previous 12 months.	Must have lived in the country for 180 days prior to childbirth.			
Paternity leave	Must live in same household with child.	Must live with child's mother.		Must have been employed at least six of the previous ten months.	Must be employed.
Parental leave		Must have lived in the country for 180 days before childbirth; must live with child's mother.	She/he must have been employed for at least six months before childbirth or have lived in the country for 12 months.	She/he must have been employed for at least six of the previous ten months.	She/he must have custody of the child.

1.2.6 Non-biological parents

In terms of parental leave, adoptive parents in the Nordic countries have nearly the same rights as biological parents. In Denmark, the only difference for adoptive parents is that they are able to take two weeks of parental leave together. In Finland and Norway, an adoptive mother is not entitled to the period of maternity that precedes childbirth to which biological mothers are entitled. In Norway, an adoptive father can use his father quota also during the first six weeks of parental leave, which in biological families is reserved for the mother. There are also age restrictions: in Finland, an adopted child must be below the age of seven for the parents to be entitled to parental leave, and in Sweden, parental allowances are not paid to parents who adopt a child over the age of ten.

Same-sex parents have recently obtained the right to parental leave for both partners, even if they are not a child's biological or adoptive parents. In Iceland, same-sex couples can go on parental leave – they have all of the same rights and obligations as heterosexual couples. In Finland, a same-sex partner living in a registered partnership with the biological parent is entitled to parental leave. In Sweden, a same-sex partner (“other parent”

or “intimate person”) of the child’s biological mother or father is entitled to paternity leave and parental leave. In Denmark, men living in a same-sex partnership with children can take paternity leave, and the same applies to a female adoptive mother who is the spouse of the child’s biological mother. In Norway, a same-sex adoptive mother or father is entitled to a parental allowance. In a lesbian couple, both partners are counted as parents in the case of artificial insemination – the non-biological mother as a “co-mother” – and are entitled to parental allowance.

1.2.7 Flexibility

One reason for building more flexibility into the parental leave system is to advance fathers’ leave use (Rostgaard 2002). The Nordic countries have increased flexibility by extending the timeframe within which leave can be taken and allowing the use of leave in several shorter increments. Another method has been to make it possible to stretch the leave into a longer period at a lower compensation level. In addition, a daily or weekly organisation of leave time has become more flexible, with the possibility of part-time leave that can be combined with part-time work.

Denmark has the longest period during which parents are entitled to parental leave: the leave entitlement period extends up to the child’s ninth birthday. In Sweden, the right to leave is for at least three periods per parent annually, until the child turns eight or completes his or her first year of school. In Norway, 27 weeks of leave at full compensation, or 37 weeks of leave at a reduced compensation, can be used (after the first six weeks) within three years of childbirth, if the parent postponing leave is working full time. In Iceland, it has been possible to use nine months of parental leave in the course of 18 months following the birth of the child, either in a continuous period or in several increments. In the beginning of 2010, the period during which it is possible to use leave was extended to three years (Eydal 2010). Danish parents can extend their 32 weeks of leave with at compensation to 40 weeks at a reduced compensation. A family can save 8–13 weeks of leave for later use, up to the child’s ninth birthday, and even later, if the employer agrees to the arrangement.

Of all the Nordic countries, Finland has the least flexible leave system. Mothers are not allowed to delay using their leave, and have to use their maternity and parental leave approximately within a ten-month period, starting before childbirth and extending thereafter. Four months of ma-

ternity leave must be used in a continuous period, while both parents can divide parental leave into two separate periods. Fathers enjoy greater flexibility: three weeks of paternity leave may be divided into a maximum of four periods, and the “father’s month” (six weeks) can be used in the course of 30 weeks following the mother’s parental leave period. The flexibility in the “father’s month” was introduced because mothers often go on care leave, which in many families was an obstacle to fathers using the leave allocated to them (six weeks).

Parental leave can be used on a part-time basis in Sweden, Norway and Finland. In Denmark and Iceland, parents have no legal right to part-time leave, but it is possible to negotiate with an employer (Gislason 2004). The most flexible system, with numerous part-time alternatives, exists in Sweden, where parents are able to use parental leave, for example, in one-hour daily increments. In Norway, the previous time-accounting system of 50, 60, 75, 80 or 90% of work time and a partial parental allowance (Haataja 2004) has been replaced with “graduated leave” which provides even more options for combining part-time leave with part-time employment.

Finland introduced part-time leave later than the other Nordic countries (in 2003), and the system is not as attractive because the conditions are more restrictive: parents can only use parental leave on a part-time basis if both parents abbreviate their working hours simultaneously during a period of no less than two months. It is not possible to extend one’s parental leave by taking part-time leave, which means that this option is first and foremost a way of returning to work earlier while the other parent assumes a share of childcare. It does not appear to be in the parents’ interest, because only a few dozen families avail themselves of part-time leave each year (Salmi, Lammi-Taskula & Närvi 2009).

1.2.8 Parental allowance

Nordic parents receive economic compensation for lost income while on parental leave. This compensation may be income related or flat rate. The compensation is crucial for family economy, but it also symbolises the value society places on care work. A low compensation is considered less encouraging for fathers’ leave use, because, as a result of segregation and discrimination in working life, men frequently earn higher incomes than women (Haataja & Nyberg 2006).

The level of income-related compensation during leave varies somewhat between the Nordic countries (Table 5). When it comes to income-based parental allowances, Finland pays the lowest compensation, and Denmark and Norway the highest. On the other hand, paternity leave in Norway is unpaid and wages during leave must be negotiated with one's employer.

In Denmark, compensation when on maternity, paternity and parental leave is 90% of previous income. Norwegian parents receive 80–100% of their previous income during parental leave. In Sweden, parents receive 80% of previous income for 390 days of parental leave, and a lower, flat rate for the last 90 days. Icelandic mothers and fathers were receiving 80% of their previous income, but since the beginning of 2010, those earning more than the ceiling only receive 75% of their previous income (Eydal 2010).

In Finland, the compensation level varies from 70 to 90%, depending on the leave period and previous income, so that the compensation is lower for parents with higher incomes. For the first 56 days (about nine weeks), mothers receive a 90% maternity leave, and 70% for the rest of maternity leave (7.5 weeks). Mothers and fathers on parental leave both receive 75% for the first five weeks and 70% for the remainder of the period (21 weeks).

Table 5. Level of parental allowance in 2010 (% of previous income)

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
Maternity leave	90%*	70–90%	75–80%	80–100%	80%
Paternity leave	90%*	70%	-	0*	80%
Parental leave	90%*	70–75%	75–80%	80–100%	80%
Father's quota	90%*	70–75%	75–80%	80–100%	80%

* Full wages as per collective bargaining agreements.

All of the Nordic countries, with the exception of Finland, have established a ceiling for parental allowances. In 2010, the maximum limit was highest in Norway and lowest in Denmark. In Norway, the compensation cannot be higher than six times the national minimum allowance. In Iceland, as a result of the economic crisis, the ceiling has been lowered several times, and by 2010 it was a little over half of what it had been in 2007 (Eydal 2010).

The minimum allowance (Table 6) is paid to parents not receiving income-related compensation because they did not meet the requirement of previous labour market activity or because they are students. Denmark has the highest minimum allowance, if one defines as a minimum allowance the amount paid during parental leave to young parents under the

age of 25 who have been receiving reduced social benefits (“Ungesats”, or youth allowance). Among the other countries, the minimum allowance is highest in Finland. It is paid during maternity, paternity and parental leave, if the recipient’s income prior to the leave was lower than € 6513 annually. In Norway, those who were not employed for six months of the ten months leading up to the birth of the child receive a one-time payment following childbirth. Swedish parents whose income was lower than SEK 180 per day for the 240 days preceding the birth of the child receive a minimum allowance for 480 days of parental leave. In Iceland, the level of the minimum allowance depends on the amount of time worked before the leave began: parents who were working part time receive less than those who worked full time. Full-time students receive a larger minimum allowance than those who worked full time.

Table 6. Minimum allowance and cut-off points for parental leave (€ per month¹⁵) in 2010

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
Minimum allowance	1092*	551	383	500**	604
% of average income***	26%	19%	16%	10%	19%
Ceiling of benefit	2036****	-	1830	4053	3318

* For young parents under the age of 25 who have received reduced benefits (“Ungesats”, or youth allowance).

** One-time amount of NOK 5,000 following childbirth, distributed here over 10 months.

*** For average income in 2007, see Eydal & Rostgaard in this book.

**** For full-time employees.

1.2.9 Gender equality bonus

As an economic incentive for parents to divide parental leave between themselves more equally, Sweden in 2008 introduced a gender equality bonus. The equality bonus translates into economic compensation in the form of a tax break that parents can cash in the year after their leave. The more equitably parents divide the leave days, the larger the bonus. The bonus is paid out to the parent who used the greatest number of days with parental allowance, while he or she was working or studying, when the other parent was on parental allowance. If both parents use an equal

¹⁵ According to the exchange rate at the end of 2009.

amount of leave time, the bonus money goes to the younger one. For each day of more equally used leave time, parents receive a maximum of SEK 100 (€ 10.20), and couples who divide the leave exactly in half receive a maximum of SEK 13,500 (€ 1,375) as an extra tax break. In the case of multiple births, the equality bonus can be even bigger. The bonus is given in connection with the final tax return as a tax break. For a family to be able to use the bonus, both parents must first have used their 60 days' quota periods. Parents who are not living together have the same right to the bonus as those living in the same household. It is required, however, that parents have shared custody of the child.

1.3 Patterns of leave use

The differences between the Nordic countries that have emerged in the rules governing parental leave are also reflected in how leave is used. It may actually be considered questionable to compare patterns of use, since the rules are so different. We intend, however, to make a general comparison, and to point out the difficulties in making the comparison.

1.3.1 *Leave use among mothers*

In all of the Nordic countries, the overwhelming majority of mothers use parental leave. It is taken for granted to such an extent that information about the proportion of mothers who use parental leave is rarely published.

In Denmark, it is necessary to turn to questionnaire data, since Statistics Denmark does not publish figures that would make it possible to estimate mothers' leave use. According to Olsen's (2007) study of survey data on parental leave, 94% of mothers used parental leave. An even greater proportion used maternity leave.

In Finland, nearly all mothers go on parental and maternity leave and less than 1% of women choose not to use leave. However, 1.5% of mothers work during maternity leave and 4% during parental leave as it is possible to work at the same time as receiving the minimum level of compensation (Salmi, Lammi-Taskula & Närvi 2009). A large proportion of mothers also make use of the care allowance.

In Iceland, the statistical starting point is that all mothers take advantage of their right to parental leave. Between 2001 and 2008, 99–

100% of mothers used some part of that right (Vinnumálasjóður 2010). The mothers who use leave are the starting point for calculating the share of fathers who use parental leave. Questionnaire data also shows that, in 2001–2004, 99% of mothers took parental leave, as did 88% of fathers (Jonsdóttir & Adalsteinsson 2008).

In Norway, only mothers who work for the six months leading up to the birth of the child are entitled to parental leave, meaning that approximately one-fifth receive a one-time payment upon the birth of the child instead of receiving compensation over the course of the parental leave period. Yearly data on the proportion of mothers who use parental leave is not available, but it is possible to make an approximate calculation by relating the number of mothers who use parental leave to all mothers who use parental benefits (in other words, parental leave plus the one-time payments). This rough calculation shows that in 2000, 80% of mothers used parental leave, which increased to slightly over 82% in 2009 (Duvander's calculation from the figures available at www.nav.no).

In Sweden, approximately 95% of all mothers choose to use parental allowance during their child's first year. Parental allowance can be used until the child turns eight, and if one tracks children up to the age of eight years, the share of mothers using parental allowance has increased to 96.7% (children born in 2000, figures from the National Social Insurance Agency (Försäkringskassan) statistics portal). The figure varies somewhat from year to year, and it is likely that a large segment of the mothers who did not use parental allowance are immigrants who moved to Sweden after the child was already born, or mothers who emigrated before they had a chance to use the benefit. Another group of non-users is mothers who are self-employed, without the same opportunities to avail themselves of parental allowance.

1.3.2 Leave use among fathers

More information is available about fathers parental leave use, in part because many countries have undertaken political efforts to increase the share of men who use leave. In Denmark, registry data offers a rough measure of the proportion of fathers taking advantage of parental leave ("barselsorlov", which includes paternity leave) through a comparison of the number of fathers using parental leave/paternity leave to the number of children born in a particular year. Some of the fathers who used paren-

tal leave had had the child the year before, but since most of the leave consists of the first two weeks of paternity leave, the measure offers a reasonably good picture. The measure shows that in 2003, 68% of fathers used parental or paternity leave, increasing incrementally to nearly 79% by 2008. Looking at questionnaire data, we find that 89% of fathers reported using paternity leave and 24% reported using parental leave (Olsen 2007).

In Finland, 83% of fathers used paternity leave and 17% used parental leave in 2008 (calculation by Lammi-Taskula from registry data). These figures are obtained by comparing the number of children born to the number of benefit users per year. The number of fathers using leave has increased in recent years, and is expected to keep growing in the years to come.

In Iceland, paternity leave was available to private sector employees for three years before the great parental leave reform of 2001. Approximately one-third of fathers in private sector jobs used paternity leave (Haataja 2009). Fathers in public sector jobs were entitled to two weeks of paternity leave with full compensation from their employer, and even though this information has not been registered, we can assume a high rate of participation. After 2000, there is no paternity leave per se, but there is the portion of parental leave that is reserved for fathers. In 2001, 82.4% of Icelandic fathers used parental leave, a figure that had risen to 87.6% by 2006 and to 88.5% by 2007 (Eydal & Gíslason 2008, Information from The Childbirth Leave Fund and personal communication with Gíslason).

It should be pointed out that the statistics are not entirely comparable, because the rules governing entitlement to parental leave and paternity leave vary by country. In Norway, for example, fathers' right to parental leave has been tied to mothers' rights, which has contributed to a lower level of participation. It is difficult to obtain up-to-date information on the number of fathers using parental leave from statistics regularly issued by the statistical office. It is also not possible to compare the number of leave users to the number of children born, because information on parental allowance is only presented for the first half of each year. One study using registry data from 2000 indicates that 85% of entitled fathers used parental leave (Lappegård 2008), which, another study estimated as corresponding to 60% of all fathers (Duvander, Lappegård, Andersson 2009).

In Sweden, 44.7% of fathers of children born in 2007 went on parental leave during the child's first year. Many fathers use parental leave a little later in the child's life; 72.1% used parental leave within the first two

years of the child's life (children born in 2006). By the time the child had turned eight and the possibility of taking parental leave had passed, 88.3% of fathers had used parental leave (fathers of children born in 2000) (data from the National Social Insurance Agency statistics portal).

1.3.3 Men's and women's share of leave use

The figures that are often used when comparing the Nordic countries, and those used by NOSOSCO, concern the share of parental leave used by mothers and fathers. Maternity leave and paternity leave are usually included. It should be noted that the shares are dependent on what has been included in each parent's share and that there are shortcomings in the concordance of how the countries handle their statistics. For instance, Anita Haataja (2009) has shown that the shares vary depending on whether paternity leave has been included or not. Whether parental leave can be used before childbirth and whether various forms of pregnancy-time compensation have been included also affect the comparison, and these entitlements change from one country to another.

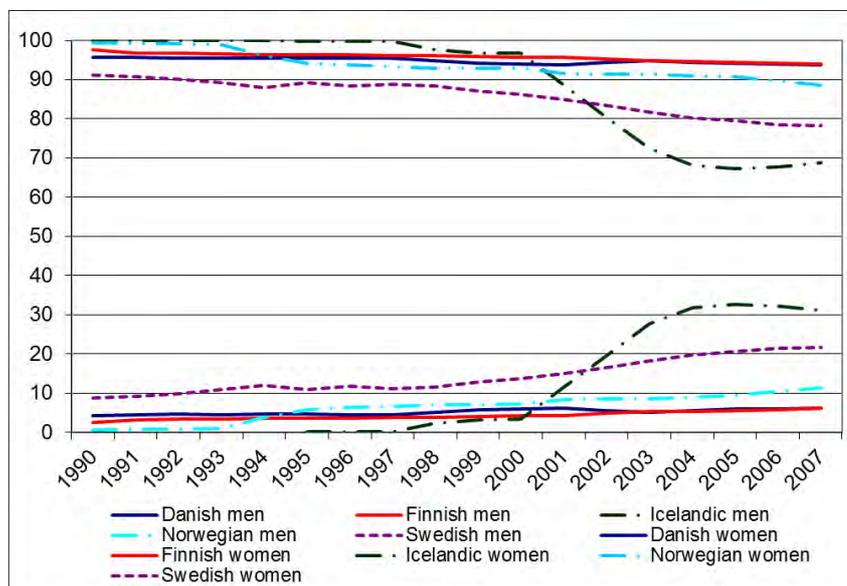


Figure 3. Men's and women's share of leave use in the Nordic countries.

Source: Nososco.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, mothers' share of parental leave use has declined, an obvious consequence of the increase in fathers' leave use. In the early 1990s mothers used up nearly all of the parental leave in all Nordic countries, with the exception of Sweden, where fathers were using one-tenth of the leave. In terms of the gender difference, the variation between the countries increases markedly up to the present day. Only in Finland and Denmark did the share of mothers not decline by all that much. The greatest change has occurred in Iceland, where the proportion of leave used by mothers has shrunk from the entire leave period to the current two-thirds. This has occurred as a result of the reforming of the Icelandic parental leave system, which makes it impossible for mothers to use more than two-thirds of the leave. It is important to point out that the drop in mothers' share does not mean that they are using fewer days of parental leave, because the length of the leave period itself has changed in several countries since the 1990s. For example, it is likely that the "low" share of leave use among Swedish mothers ensues from the fact that Sweden has the longest leave and that its length was extended in the early 2000s. It is also important to note that comparisons of leave use shares utilise annual figures, but that in many countries parental leave can be utilised over a longer period. In Denmark and Sweden, parental leave can be used up until the child is of school age and people often save portions of the leave (Olsen 2007), while in Norway leave can be taken only in the period directly following childbirth. A change in policy will therefore affect leave use more directly in certain countries, while in others the effect will be felt more gradually. It is clear, for example, that the introduction of the "father's month" in Norway in 1993 diminished the share of days used by mothers, whereas in Sweden, the effect of the introduction of the one-month period reserved for fathers in 1995 is not similarly obvious (see Figure 3).

Fathers' share of leave is a mirror image of mothers' share, and the same reservations are necessary as when interpreting mothers' share. Also, fathers' eligibility criteria for parental leave differ from one country to another, as mentioned earlier.

Another factor that may influence leave use is that in Finland, for instance, a bonus period is added if the father decides to use parental leave. In other words, usage affects the "base". Further, NOSOSCO's comparisons include paternity leave as part of parental leave, even though it only exists in some countries and in Sweden is an employment-based entitlement.

Finally, one should ask what parental leave intended for both mothers and fathers entails. In certain countries, the leave can be taken together, but not in all. Some countries allow the leave to be taken at a later stage in the child's life, which for example allows for a longer summer vacation with one's children. As already mentioned, it must be pointed out that the meaning parental leave has for individuals is influenced by these factors, for example in terms of care, responsibility for the child and forms of contact. That most fathers now use parental leave does not mean that the mother is not at home at the same time. Both in Finland and Norway it is found that mothers are frequently at home during the father's leave period (Salmi, Lammi-Taskula & Närvi 2009, Brandth & Överli 1998). There may also be certain economic motivations to use parental leave instead of, for example, unemployment compensation. The growing use of parental leave by fathers must nevertheless be seen as a significant step on the way to shared parental responsibility for childcare.

A useful comparison would be to look at how long a period both parents spend on parental leave and how this differs between different countries. Figures for making such comparisons are not currently available, and even if they were, the comparisons would be questionable. Some countries have other forms of care allowances, and merely looking at parental leave to determine the time spent at home would lead to a large underestimation of it (see Eydal & Rostgard in this volume). It is also not possible to simply add on each instance of someone using childcare allowance, because allowances can also be used for purposes other than being at home with a child (for example, to pay for a babysitter/nanny). Another example of the difficulties in making comparisons is that in Sweden, one must distinguish between parental leave and parental allowance. Many people extend the leave at home by staying at home partly without compensation and partly on parental allowance. In other words, the number of days on parental allowance is frequently an under-estimation of the actual leave period, especially for mothers (Berggren 2004). In Iceland, it seems to be common to combine work and parental leave (Gislason 2007). Appendix A provides an introduction to and description of the registry data that are publicly available in the Nordic countries.

1.4 What factors influence the use of parental leave?

With the above differences in mind, it is interesting to delve deeper and to examine the patterns of use. What factors influence leave use among mothers and fathers? There are numerous studies on the covariance or influence of different factors on the use of parental leave in the Nordic countries. Most studies have focused on use by fathers, not the time mothers are away from working life. The studies utilise different types of data, methods and theoretical perspectives, making it impossible to contrast the results obtained in different countries. We will attempt to provide a picture of what research in the Nordic countries has come up with, in spite of the fact that such a survey of research can by no means be considered exhaustive.

1.4.1 *Change over time*

It is important to remember that parental insurance in the Nordic countries has evolved over the course of its existence. Many reforms have taken place and leave lengths have been extended several times. Patterns of use have changed in that more mothers obtained the right to income-related compensation and leave use among fathers has increased. Thus, the results from earlier studies may not accurately describe the situation as it is today.

Extending parental leave has made it possible for fathers to take leave without mothers having to use less. In Iceland, the fact that the three months granted to fathers did not eat away the time given to mothers, and that the entire package of parental insurance was expanded simultaneously, were reasons for why the change in the use pattern occurred so quickly (Eydal & Gíslason 2008). For women especially, even a long parental leave period, in practise, can mean a shorter break from working life, compared to leaving the workforce completely (Rönsen & Sundström 2002). A steady job to which to return has been shown to reduce the time spent at home (Salmi, Lammi-Taskula & Närvi 2009). If the leave is very long, it may however become difficult to return to work afterwards, and the absence from working life can become even longer (Rönsen & Sundström 2002). In addition, it has emerged in Sweden that a long leave diminishes women's chances of career advancement (Evertsson & Duvander 2009).

Danish women, tend to lose some of their human capital value during a child-related absence from the labour market, resulting in a loss of income. However, this appears mostly to be a short-term effect (Datta Gupta & Smith 2002).

As for leave use among fathers, introducing a part of the leave specially reserved for fathers has had a significant impact. In Denmark, the share of fathers going on parental leave increased from 7% to 24% in the four years (1998–2001) during which fathers had two weeks especially reserved for them (Borchorst 2006). In Iceland, Norway and Sweden, all of which today provide leave periods reserved specifically for fathers, the immediate effect of the change was clearly visible (Lappegård 2008, Eydal & Gíslason 2008, Nyman & Pettersson 2002). In Sweden, the increase does not show in the average share of leave days used, but the proportion of fathers who used leave grew from 50% to 85%, when comparing the number of fathers of children born the year before the “father’s month” was introduced to the number of children born in the year that it was already in effect. Nevertheless, even though the increase in parental leave use was substantial, any increase in fathers subsequently staying at home to care for a sick child has not been found (Ekberg, Eriksson & Friebel 2004). Similarly, the increase in use was smaller from the second “father’s month” than the first (Erikson 2005). In Norway, the problem has been that a father’s leave entitlement has been tied to the mother’s, with the result that not all fathers have been able to use the leave. Some part of the leave being reserved for the father has been the subject of a great deal of media interest in each of the countries, perhaps particularly in Iceland, where its introduction was part of a whole new system of parental insurance (Eydal & Gíslason 2008).

One of the most recent reforms in the attempt to equalise leave use between the genders is the gender equality bonus that Sweden instituted in the summer of 2008. During the first 18 months, however, the bonus seems not to have changed usage significantly (National Social Insurance Agency 2010). In Finland, the share of fathers who go on parental leave has grown following the introduction of bonus days (father’s month) in 2003. At the same time, though, the share of days per father has declined, since most now only make use of the father’s month but not more than that.

Further, the compensation levels for parental leave have changed over time, something that may also influence leave use. In Sweden, for example, compensation levels declined from 90% to 75% during the 1990s eco-

conomic crisis. Thereafter, compensation was brought up to 80% again, but the compensation ceiling lagged behind and a growing share of parents had income over the ceiling in the 1990s (Batljan 2000). Studies indicate that the ceiling has an impact on the number of parental allowance days that fathers in particular decide to use (Sundström & Duvander 2002). The situation has changed, in that the ceiling has been altered and as most employees are part of collective bargaining agreements that provide extra compensation beyond the ceiling. In Norway, when a couple chooses a longer leave at a lower compensation level, it primarily affects the length of the mother's maternity leave. Parents both in high-status and low-status professions have chosen shorter leaves, though for different reasons. Those in low-status professions made the choice for economic reasons, whereas those with higher-status jobs chose a shorter leave because they wanted to return to work (Grambo & Myklebø 2008).

1.4.2 *The labour market*

The main aim of the parental insurance is to provide the possibility of combining working life with having children. It appears that Norwegian, Finnish and Swedish mothers return to work sooner if they have a job prior to having a child (Rönsen & Sundström 2002). This can be seen as an indication that the system of parental insurance is functioning. Moreover, it appears that the Swedish men who are not using parental leave are those outside the labour market or with a weak connection to it (Nyman & Pettersson 2002). In Iceland, fathers who do not live in the same household as their children, and those who are students, are overrepresented in the group of non-users of parental leave (Eydal 2008). For women, the situation is probably the reverse, manifested for example in the fact that Finnish women without a steady job prior to going on parental leave stay at home the longest (Salmi, Lammi-Taskula & Närvi 2009).

An often-discussed question is the role of income level in the use of parental allowance. Economic factors and attitudes connected to gender roles are frequently seen as alternative explanations to the unequal uptake of parental leave. However, these factors cannot easily be separated from one another and they are often correlated. On the question of how important income is for fathers' leave use, studies are conflicted. In Iceland, a positive correlation between income and use of parental leave was found (Eydal 2008). Fathers with higher incomes are also more likely to

use part of the shared, un-earmarked portion of parental leave (Gíslason 2007). In a qualitative study of fathers who had stayed at home for more than the three months reserved for them, it emerged that one decisive factor was the mother's position in the labour market (Gíslason 2005, referenced in Gíslason 2007). Further, studies from Iceland show that loss of income was a reason not to use the three reserved months (Jonsdottir & Adalsteinsson 2008).

We have also observed that, in the middle of the 1990s among Swedish fathers, higher income was correlated with longer parental leave (up to the ceiling) (Sundström & Duvander 2002). Later figures yield a less clear-cut picture. A simple grouping of registry data by income, without considering other factors, shows that only fathers with low income stand out from the rest by taking shorter leaves in the 2000s (National Social Insurance Agency 2008). Women's income, on the other hand, plays a major role in how much leave they use. Women earning higher incomes had used fewer parental allowance days by the time their child had turned three. It is possible that leave use among mothers with higher incomes increases when the child grows older, and presumably these figures do not mean that children with mothers who earn more spend less time at home. Rather, it may mean that the fathers of those same children spend longer on parental leave and that the parents can afford to live on a lower compensation level, in order to be able to use their parental allowance for longer. Other Swedish studies show that low-income mothers take long leaves, while fathers with low income take short leaves (Duvander 2006). Similar findings have emerged in Norway (Lappegård 2008).

Another way of looking at income is to examine the relationship between mother's income and father's income, and several Norwegian studies indicate that the more equal the parents' wages, the more parental leave the father uses (Lappegård 2008, Brandth & Kvande 2003, Fougner 2009). This is not as clear in Sweden, primarily because income differences are more "compressed" among low-income earners than among high-income earners, and it is among low-income earners that the mother usually takes a longer leave (Sundström & Duvander 2002). Findings show, however, that fathers' leave use is likely to increase when mothers earn more (Ljungh & Nyman 2005).

Education is often used in analyses of parental leave use, frequently as a measure of the employment situation, not least as wage differences in the Nordic countries have been relatively small. Education is also regular-

ly used as a measure of attitudes, the assumption usually being that the highly educated espouse more gender-equal attitudes, compared to people with lower education. Education level is also correlated with workplace-related factors, which can encourage or complicate the decision to go on parental leave. A highly educated person has more possibilities to take parental leave according to her or his preferences, while someone with less education is more likely to find themselves in a more limited situation. It appears that education is important; a mother's level of education, for example, is a significant factor in fathers' leave use (Duvander 2006). Finnish mothers with less education stay on leave longer than women with more education, who often share leave with the father (Lammi-Taskula 2007, Salmi, Lammi-Taskula & Närvi 2009). In Denmark, highly educated fathers are more likely to use parental leave, and a greater portion of the leave, while highly educated women are more likely to share the leave (Olsen 2007). Also in Norway, less-educated fathers are less likely to use parental leave (Brandth & Kvande 2002).

Other factors that play a role in the labour market include that parents working in the public sector tend to go on leave for longer than those in the private sector (Bygren & Duvander 2005, Duvander 2006, Brandth & Kvande 2003, Olsen 2007, Grambo & Myklebø 2008, Fougner 2009, Lammi-Taskula 2007). This may have to do with work climate and openness toward longer interruptions in employment; other studies support this (Haas, Allard & Hwang, 2002, Brandth & Kvande 2002). Most Icelandic parents, however, experience positive treatment with regard to parental leave (Gíslason 2008). The same has been shown in Finland, where workplace attitudes are becoming increasingly positive. In Finland, it is women working in temporary positions who are having difficulties going on parental leave (Salmi, Lammi-Taskula & Närvi 2009). It seems that if a number of fathers in a given workplace have already gone on parental leave, the likelihood of a man in that same workplace going on a longer leave is greater, whereas this has no effect on mothers' leave use (Bygren & Duvander 2005). Fathers working in larger workplaces take longer leaves (Grambo & Myklebø 2008, Bygren & Duvander 2005). Further, fathers with steady employment, who do not work overtime, take the longest leaves (Brandth & Överli 1998).

Because mothers and fathers decide jointly about parental leave, one parent's work situation affects the other's parental leave use (cf. Lappegård 2008b, Brandth & Överli 1998). The length of parental leave varies by occu-

pation, which is in line with the findings from the studies mentioned above on income and education. In Denmark, fathers with “higher” occupational qualifications, such as engineers, attorneys and teachers, take longer leaves than those with “lower” qualifications, such as machine workers, office workers and craftsmen (Mesterton 2008). The opposite is true of mothers, i.e. those in the lowest-level positions take longer leaves (Mesterton 2008). In Norway, however, it appears that men in executive positions are less likely to go on leave (Brandth & Överli 1998).

It is obvious that, as a group, self-employed in Norway and Denmark stand out among fathers by taking no parental leave, but when they do go on leave, they go for longer (Grambo & Överli 2008, Mesterton 2008). In Denmark, women entrepreneurs take shorter leaves, compared with both employed and unemployed mothers (Olsen 2007).

1.4.3 Demographics

Certain demographic factors also have a significant impact on parental leave use. It is likely that these factors in turn are compounded by other factors that are more difficult to measure. For example, both in Sweden and Norway, mothers as well as fathers take longer leaves when they have their first child (Sundström & Duvander 2002, Duvander 2006, Lappegård 2008a). This may have to do with the fact that, at that point, many parents’ financial responsibility for the family is not yet as significant, and they can afford to stay at home longer. Another explanation could be that the system of sibling priority in many kindergartens makes it easier to get a subsequent child into a kindergarten than was the case with the first child.

In Iceland, a father is more likely to go on parental leave if he lives with the child’s mother (Eydal 2008), which is presumably true for the other countries as well. The idea that established couples are more likely to share leave is confirmed also by the finding that married Norwegian and Swedish fathers use more leave (Sundström & Duvander 2002, Lappegård 2008a).

Further, the leave length of fathers and mothers depends on their age. This may have to do with changes in attitudes by age, but also with the fact that younger employment situation is often different from that of older parents’. In Sweden, older mothers and younger fathers take longer leaves (Duvander 2006). In Denmark, older fathers take the longest leaves, while a mother’s age seems to have little effect (Mesterton 2008). In Norway, fathers aged 29–35 take the longest leaves (Lappegård 2008a).

Immigrant parents are frequently in a worse employment situation and therefore find it harder to use parental leave in an optimal way, including benefiting from a higher level of compensation and being able to optimise leave flexibility. In Sweden, a larger proportion of immigrant fathers do not use parental allowance at all, but among those who do, they use more parental allowance days on average, compared to Swedish-born fathers (Duvander & Eklund 2006). The differences are less significant among mothers, but the proportion of women entitled to only a low level of compensation during parental leave is much higher among immigrant mothers.

1.4.4 Attitudes

There is no doubt that the traditional gender system contributes to the skewed distribution in parental leave use. One example is that Finnish men, who consider it their task to provide for the family, are less likely to take parental leave (Salmi, Lammi-Taskula & Närvi 2009). Since these gender-specific systems have not disappeared, parent's use of gender-neutral rules tend to be influenced by tradition (Brandth & Kvande 2005). Many parents prefer greater freedom of choice, manifested, for example, in wanting to take away the period reserved exclusively for fathers (Grambo & Myklebø 2009). It is also important to remember that both mothers and fathers are often satisfied with the unequal division of leave. It is also true that to this day, children and the household often continue to represent the domain where women make most of the decisions. According to a Swedish study, a large proportion of both mothers and fathers claimed that it is the mother's preferences that are decisive in how parental leave is divided (Duvander & Berggren 2003). There are many studies about why fathers are or are not taking leave, whereas a mother's desire to be on leave is usually taken for granted. Father's arguments about using leave are not only concerned with the best interest of the child, but also an individual desire to be at home for his own sake, or taking a break from work (Lammi-Taskula 2007, Björnberg 1998). Most parents agree, however, that paternity leave is important for establishing a connection between father and child (Brandth & Överli 1998).

Attitudes towards parenthood and parental leave are also often seen as indirectly measured in factors such as income and education. Several qualitative studies illustrate the complex interplay between attitudes and possibilities framed by for example income and work situation (Brandth &

Kvande 2002, Olsen 2005, Bekkengen 2002). Lappegård (2008) shows that fathers take shorter leaves if the mother is working part time, presumably because the family is following a traditional division of childcare responsibilities. Sometimes parents are not entirely conscious of these attitudes and values, and it can be difficult to determine what really directs parental leave decisions. Family economy is often brought forth as one of the key factors in leave use (Duvander & Berggren 2003, Lammi-Taskula 2007), but other studies show that parents don't always have such a clear idea of what to do in order to optimise family income during parental leave (RFV 2000), or that economic consequences are not even calculated (Salmi, Lammi-Taskula & Närvi 2009). This does not mean that economy does not matter; obviously economic considerations set certain boundaries for how long parents are able to stay at home with a child.

1.5 Discussion and summary

Differences in the system of parental insurance and the rules that govern it are reflected in how parental leave is used. That Icelandic men take the largest quota of the leaves is connected to the fact that they have been handed the largest quota of the leave period. Sweden has made parental leave available to both parents for the longest time, which is probably why Swedish fathers go on leave for longer than fathers in Norway, Finland or Denmark.

Knowledge of similarities and differences in leave use between the Nordic countries is, however, scanty and in need of improvement. If the statistical authorities issued statistics compiled in comparable ways, the picture of parental leave use in the Nordic countries would be much clearer. It would for example be valuable to obtain information about the share of fathers and mothers who use parental leave in each country. One of the problems here is that parental leave can be taken for different lengths of time in the different countries, and that there are differences in eligibility requirements. But for the sake of comparability, certain criteria should be established in a way that is concordant, for example, by compiling information about beneficiaries during the first two years of a child's life, all mothers and fathers partaking of the benefits and the number of all those eligible.

The patterns of use seem to be similar in all of the Nordic countries, i.e. the fathers and mothers with similar characteristics are more likely to

take leave. We can see clearly that legislation plays a role, for example leave that is reserved for fathers' use. As far as income, fathers who are outside the labour market are overrepresented among those fathers who do not take leave, while the opposite pattern is true for mothers. In Norway, individuals are not entitled to parental leave if they are outside of the labour market, which is an example of how rules influence differences in usage by country. Of parents who are in the labour market, it appears that fathers with relatively high incomes, positions or occupational status use more leave, but that those in the very highest positions (for example, executives and directors) or with the very highest income, represent an exception to this positive correlation. Women in high positions and with higher education, on the other hand, take shorter leaves. The gender-specific pattern is connected to a gender-specific situation in the labour market. The age of mothers and fathers can also be connected to their labour market position and their ability to use parental leave. Because the compensation levels and conditions for parental leave change over time, there is a substantial need for new studies of the various factors that influence parental leave use. Especially the effect of income on parental leave can change over time. For example, increasing the ceiling can change the incentives to take leave among some groups of parents.

There are also differences in how parents use parental leave in different workplaces. In all of the Nordic countries, public sector employees take the longest leaves. A number of studies suggest that employers have varying attitudes towards parental leave, but the trend seems to be that negative attitudes toward parental leave are declining, especially when leave is taken by members of the permanent workforce. Mostly mothers still seem to have the largest say in how childcare responsibilities are divided.

Even though divorce and separations are relatively common among Nordic parents, they often take place later in a child's life rather than during the parental leave period. Regarding parental leave, different countries grant different rights to fathers who do not live with their children. Giving fathers an individual right to parental leave, regardless of his relationship to the mother, could be one way of fostering his future relationship with the child. This has been the approach used in Sweden. To base this right instead on the father's relationship to the mother can be a way of avoiding conflict, which has been part of the Finnish approach. Both approaches are used in the name of the wellbeing of the child.

It has become the norm in all of the Nordic countries, also among fathers, to take parental leave. Those who do not use this right are now likely to be seen as the exceptions. It can be viewed as participation in parental responsibility when a father takes leave while the mother is still at home, whereas it signifies individual responsibility for the child when a father takes a long leave after the mother has already returned to work.

References

- Batljan, I. & Andersson, P. (2000). *Taket i sjuk- och föräldraförsäkringen år 2001*. In SOU 2000:121.
- Bekkengen, L. (2002). *Man får välja – om föräldraskap och föräldraledighet i arbetsliv och familjeliv*. Malmö, Sweden: Liber.
- Berggren, S. (2004). *Flexibel föräldrapenning – hur mammor och pappor använder föräldraförsäkringen och hur länge de är föräldralediga*. RFV Analyserar 2004:14. Riksförsäkringsverket, Stockholm.
- Björnberg, U. (1998). Family orientation among men – A process of change in Sweden. In: E. Drew, R. Emerek & E. Mahon (eds.), *Women, work and the family in Europe*, Routledge, London.
- Borchorst, A. (2005). The public-private split rearticulated: abolishment of the Danish daddy leave. Pp. 101–120. In: A. Ellingsäter & A. Leira (eds.) *Politicising Parenthood in Scandinavia*. The Policy Press.
- Brandth, B. & Överli, B. (1998). *Omsorgspermisjon med "kjaerlig tvang" – En kartlegging av fedrekvoten*. Allforsk, Trondheim.
- Brandth, B. & Kvande, E. (2002). Reflexive fathers: negotiating parental leave and working life. *Gender, Work & Organization* 9(2):186–203
- Brandth, B. & Kvande, E. (2003). *Fleksible fedre. Maskulinitet, arbeid, velferdsstat*. Universitetsforlaget, Oslo.
- Brandth, B. & Kvande, E. (2005). Fedres valgfrihet og arbeidslivets tidskulturer. *Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning*. 46(1):35–54
- Brandth, Berit & Kvande, Elin (2009). Norway. In: Moss, Peter (ed.): *International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2009*. Employment Relations Research Series No. 12. BIS, London.
- Bygren, M. & Duvander, A-Z. (2006). Parents workplace situation and fathers' parental leave use". *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol 68, s. 363–372.
- Datta Gupta, N. & Smith, N. (2002). Children and career interruptions: The family gap in Denmark. *Economica* 69:609–629.
- Duvander, A-Z. & Berggren, S. (2003). *Mamma, pappa, barn – tid och pengar. Socialförsäkringsboken 2003*. Riksförsäkringsverket, Stockholm.
- Duvander, A-Z. (2006). *Föräldrarnas användning av föräldraförsäkringen*. In: *Socialförsäkringarna – rätt och fel*. Analyserar 2006:5. Försäkringskassan, Stockholm.

- Duvander, A-Z. & Eklund, S. (2006). Utrikesfödda och svenskfödda föräldrars föräldrapenninganvändande, pp. 33–68. In: P. de los Reyes (ed.), *Om välfärdens gränser och det villkorade medborgarskapet*. SOU 2006:37. Stockholm: Fritzes.
- Duvander, A-Z, Lappegard, T. & Andersson, G. (2010). Family policy and fertility: fathers' and mothers' use of parental leave and continued childbearing in Norway and Sweden. *Journal of European Social Policy* 20(1):45–57.
- Einarsdóttir, T. & Pétursdóttir, G. (2009). Iceland. In: Moss, Peter (ed.): *International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2009*. Employment Relations Research Series No. 12. BIS, London.
- Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Ekberg, J., Eriksson, R. & Friebel, G. (2005). *Parental leave – A policy evaluation of the Swedish “daddy-month” reform*. IZA Discussion Paper, No. 1617. IZA, Bonn.
- Eriksson, R. (2005). *Parental leave in Sweden: The effects of the second daddy month*. Working Paper 9/2005. Swedish Institute for Social Research, Stockholm University, Stockholm.
- Evertsson, M. & Duvander, A-Z (2009). *Parental leave- possibility or trap? Does family leave length affect Swedish women's labour market opportunities?* SPaDE Working paper 2009:2, Demografiska avdelningen, Stockholms universitet.
- Eydal, G B. & Gíslason, I. (2008). Paid parental leave in Iceland – history and context. pp. 15–44. In: Eydal, G.B & I.V. Gíslason (eds.): *Equal Rights to Earn and Care. Parental leave in Iceland*. Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands, Reykjavík.
- Eydal, G B. (2008). Policies promoting care from both parents – the case of Iceland. pp.111–148. In: Eydal, G.B & I.V. Gíslason (eds.): *Equal Rights to Earn and Care. Parental leave in Iceland*. Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands, Reykjavík.
- Fougner, E. (2009). Fedres uttak av foreldrepenger etter fødsel. *Arbeid og velferd* 1/2009. Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet, Oslo.
- Försäkringskassans årsredovisning 2008. Försäkringskassan, Stockholm. www.forsakringskassan.se.
- Försäkringskassans årsredovisning 2009. Försäkringskassan, Stockholm. www.forsakringskassan.se.
- Försäkringskassan (2010). Jämställdhetsbonus – en effektutvärdering. Socialförsäkringsrapport 2010:5. Försäkringskassan, Stockholm. www.forsakringskassan.se.
- Gíslason, I. V. (2008). You are regarded as weird if you don't use the paternity leave. pp. 87–110. In: Eydal, G.B & I.V. Gíslason (eds.): *Equal Rights to Earn and Care. Parental leave in Iceland*. Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands, Reykjavík.
- Gíslason, I. V. (2007). *Parental leave in Iceland. Bringing the fathers in. Developments in the wake of new legislation in 2000*. Jafnréttisstofa, Reykjavík.
- Grambo, A-C. & Myklebø, S. (2008). Forhold som har betydning når mor og far deler foreldrepermisjonen. *Arbeid og velferd* 4/2008. Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet, Oslo.
- Grambo, A-C. & Myklebö, S. (2009). *Moderna familier – tradisjonelle valg – en studie av mors og fars uttak av foreldrepermisjon*. NAV-rapport 2/2009. Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet, Oslo.

- Haas, L., Allard, K. & Hwang, P. (2002). The impact of organizational culture on men's use of parental leave in Sweden. *Community, Work & Family* 5:319–342.
- Haas, L., Chronholm, A., Duvander, A. & Hwang, P. (2009). Sweden. In: Moss, Peter (ed.): *International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2009*. Employment Relations Research Series No. 12. BIS, London.
- Haataja, A. (2004). Pohjoismaiset vanhempainvapaat kahden lasta hoitavan vanhemman tukena. *Janus* vol 12, no 1 (25–48).
- Haataja, A. (2009). *Fathers' use of paternity and parental leave in the Nordic countries*. Online working papers 2/2009. Kela/Fpa, Helsinki.
- Haataja, A. & Nyberg, A. (2006). *Diverging paths? The dual-earner/dual-carer model in Finland and Sweden in the 1990's*. In: Ellingsaeter, Anne Lise & Leira, Arnlaug (eds.): *Politicising Parenthood in Scandinavia*. Policy Press, Bristol.
- Jonsdottir, B. & Adalsteinsson, G. D. (2008). Icelandic parents' perception of parental leave. pp. 65–85. In: Eydal, G.B & I.V. Gíslason (red): *Equal Rights to Earn and Care. Parental leave in Iceland*. Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands, Reykjavik.
- Lappegård, T. (2008a). Changing the gender balance in caring: Fatherhood and the Division of Parental Leave in Norway. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 27:139–159
- Lappegård, T. (2008b). *Couples' parental leave practices. The role of the workplace situation*. Discussion Papers no.561. Research Department, Statistics Norway, Oslo.
- Lammi-Taskula, J. (2007). *Parental Leave for Fathers? Gendered conceptions and Practices in Families with Young Children in Finland*. Research report 166. Stakes, Helsinki.
- Ljungh, S.Ö. & Nyman, H. (2005). *Skillnader mellan mammans och pappans arbetsinkomst och betydelsen för pappornas uttag av föräldrapenning*. In: SOU 2005:73 Reformerad föräldraförsäkring – Kärlek, Omvårdnad, Trygghet. Fritzes, Stockholm.
- Leira, A. (2006). *Parenthood change and policy reform in Scandinavia 1970s–2000s*. In: Ellingsaeter, Anne Lise & Leira, Arnlaug (eds.): *Politicising Parenthood in Scandinavia*. Policy Press, Bristol.
- Mesterton, K. (2008). *Faedre med højere stilling holder længere barselorlov*. Danmark Statistik, København.
- Moss, P. (ed.) (2009). *International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2009*. Employment Relations Research Series No. 12. BIS, London.
- Nyman, H. & Pettersson, J. (2002). *Spelade pappamånaden någon roll? – pappornas uttag av föräldrapenning*. RFV Analyserar 2002:14. Riksförsäkringsverket, Stockholm.
- Olsen, B. M. (2005). *Mænd, orlov og arbejdspladskultur. Fire danske virksomheder*. København: Socialforsknings instituttet
- Olsen, B.M. (2007). *Evaluering af den fleksible barselorlov. Orlovsreglerne set fra forældres, kommuners og arbejdspladsers perspektiv*. SFI, København.
- Riksförsäkringsverket (2000). *Båda blir bäst. Attityden till delad föräldradedighet*. RFV Redovisar 2000:1. Riksförsäkringsverket, Stockholm.
- Rostgaard, T. (2002). Setting time aside for the father: father's leave in Scandinavia. *Community, Work and Family* 5(3) 343–364.

- Rostgaard, T. (2009). Denmark. In: Moss, Peter (ed.): *International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2009*. Employment Relations Research Series No. 12. BIS, London.
- Rönsen, M. & Sunström, M. (2002). Family policy and After-birth Employment among new mothers – A comparison of Finland, Norway and Sweden. *European Journal of Population* 18:121–152.
- Salmi, M. & Lammi-Taskula, J. (2009). *Finland*. In: Moss, Peter (ed.): *International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2009*. Employment Relations Research Series No. 12. BIS, London.
- Salmi, M. & Lammi-Taskula, J. & Närvi, J. (2009). *Perhevapaat ja työelämän tasa-arvo*. Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriön julkaisuja, Työ ja yrittäjyys 24 /2009. TEM, Helsinki.
- Sundström, M. & Duvander, A-Z. (2002). Gender division of childcare and the sharing of parental leave among new parents in Sweden. *European Sociological Review*, 18(4):433–447
- Unicef (2008). *The child care transition A league table of early childhood education and care in economically advanced countries*. Innocenti Research Centre, Report Card 8. Unicef, Florence.
- Valdimarsdóttir, F.R. (2006). *Nordic experiences with parental leave and its impact on equality*.
- TemaNord 2006:531. Nordic Council of Ministers, Copenhagen.
- Vinnumálasjóður (2010). *Samantekt yfir tölulegar upplýsingar Fæðingarorlofssjóðs 2001–2009*. Vinnumálastofnun.
- Wall, Karin (2007). Leave policy models and the articulation of work and family in Europe: a comparative perspective. In: Moss, Peter & Wall, Karin (eds.): *International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2007*. Department for Business, Employment Relations Research Series No. 80. BERR, London.

Statistics

www.forsakringskassan.se

www.scb.se

www.kela.fi

www.tilastokeskus.fi

www.nav.no

www.ssb.no

www.dst.dk

www.statice.is

2. Day-care schemes and cash-for-care at home

Guðný Björk Eydal and Tine Rostgaard

International researchers often notice, and even admire, the Nordic Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) systems. So what are the common denominators of the Nordic ECEC model? On a general level, the model is acknowledged for its integration of care and education; for the emphasis on service provision over cash benefits; for being funded from tax revenues; and for the universal approach in coverage. The Nordic model is also distinguished by the decentralised organisation of services and by the fact that services are mainly provided through the public sector (Anttonen & Sipilä 1996; Rauch 2007).

By way of contrast, and as a point of reference, the Anglo-American model is often described as consisting of two parallel systems – one under the auspices of the welfare system, targeting low-income families or children with special needs; and one under the auspices of the school system, based on user fees and aimed at middle- and high-income families. The most dominant model, however, is the Continental European model, in which the public sector provides funding and offers free but only part-time day-care, through the school system, primarily for children aged 3–6, with little provision for children aged 0–2 (Kamerman 2003).

In this chapter, the OECD term Early Childhood and Education and Care (ECEC) is used. It includes “all care and learning arrangements for children under school age, regardless of location, funding, opening hours or content of the programme” (OECD 2001, 14¹⁶). It includes day-care

¹⁶ An alternative term might be “pre-school schemes”, but this does not include cash-for-care schemes. The term “day-care” is used in this chapter to cover services such as those provided by day-care institutions and family child-minding.

institutions, which go by a different name in each Nordic country but as Einarsdóttir and Wagner (2006, 8) point out:

Nordic early childhood discourse includes terms that are fundamental to Nordic philosophy and ideology, yet difficult to capture fully in translation, especially for an American audience. For instance, in America *preschool* (literally *before school*) is a super ordinate term encompassing all kinds of out-of-home care prior to the start of compulsory education. However, Nordic people use different terms and for different reasons. For instance, Icelandic people use playschools as the general term for all group care for children under the compulsory school-start age. This represents more than a simple difference in terminology. The term playschool emphasizes the central role of play in Icelandic early childhood philosophy and practice. Similarly, Danes use the term kindergarten - literally children's garden - to refer to a group care settings for children younger than compulsory school age.

Einarsdóttir (2006) and Kryger (2007) also point out that Danish kindergartens have avoided the introduction of terminology that resembles that used in schools. For example, Danish pre-school professionals have opposed their work being described as teaching, stressing instead that they care for the children.

ECEC arrangements are not, however, limited to service provision. As the influential American family-policy researcher Sheila Kamerman (2000, 8) notes, ECEC policies comprise a wide range of public-sector activities, designed to influence the supply of and/or demand for ECEC and the quality of services provided, including the direct delivery of services, direct and indirect financial subsidies to private providers, but also financial subsidies to parents, both direct and indirect, and cash benefits that enable parents to stay at home to look after their children. ECEC arrangements may thus encompass cash-for-care allowances. As the section on cash-for-care in this section will show, such benefits exist in all of the Nordic countries. The cash-for-care schemes have been debated and criticised for counteracting the objectives of the Nordic model. However, despite heavy criticism, such schemes have steadily gained ground in some of the Nordic countries.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse and compare Nordic day-care policies, i.e. ECEC services as well as cash-for-care for children under school age. The chapter examines the legislative purpose behind the provision of the services and the cash benefits as well as the take-up rates. The review of day-care will also look at how the programmes are organ-

ised and funded, and at the quality indicators of the care provided. In this context, the Nordic countries will be compared with the EU average. The review of cash-for-care will assess the key elements of the programmes: the length of time that the benefit is available, compensation, and the rules of eligibility. In this context, the analysis is based on Nordic legislation, policy documents, statistics and literature. This section will concentrate on the Nordic countries, as no comparable EU data is available.

2.1 ECEC services

2.1.1 *History and goals of ECEC services*

ECEC service provision has been an integral part of family policies for decades in the Nordic countries, as a response to increases in female labour force participation of the 1960s and 1970s, in part because of the large numbers of women entering the labour market (Leira 1992; Rostgaard & Fridberg 1998). In 1964, Denmark became the first country to legislate on day-care, followed by Finland, Iceland and Sweden in 1973, and Norway in 1975 (Sipilä 1997). From a non-Nordic perspective, there are remarkable similarities in the Nordic countries' ideologies, policies and practices concerning day-care for children. However, on closer inspection, significant differences become apparent. For example, the number of public-sector day-care programmes increased at a different pace during the 1970s and 1980s in the different countries (see Table 1).

Table 1. Children aged 0–2 and 3–6 enrolled in day-care centres or family day-care in the Nordic countries in 1984, as a percentage of all children in each age group.

	0–2		3–6		
	Day-care centre	Family day-care	Day-care institution – full time	Day-care institution – part-time	Family day-care
Denmark	18	23	43	8	7
Finland	7	12	17	10	4
Iceland	5	14	9	34	12
Norway	6	1	16	25	1
Sweden	17	13	33	21	19

(Hanssen & Elvehøj 1997, 181–183)

Compared with neighbouring countries, Sweden and Denmark had a larger proportion of children in day-care programmes early on, by the mid-1980s – both younger children (0–2 years) and older ones (3–6 years). In Iceland and Norway, a relatively small proportion of children under the age of three were looked after in day-care centres. The proportion was higher for children aged 3–6, but most were enrolled in part-time schemes (Leira 1992; Rauhala et al., 1997; Broddadóttir, Eydal, Hrafnadóttir & Sigurðardóttir 1997; Finch 2006). However, as discussed below, the proportion rose over time in all of the countries.

In general, day-care services were provided in order to facilitate the dual-income family model, where both father and mother worked full time. It was envisaged as an affordable, available and high-quality service offering a real alternative to parental care. The role of day-care services provision has been and continues to be important for the high take-up of paid labour, particularly women. For example, in Sweden in the 1970s, the extension of institutional day-care was a response to the need for “service institutions for parents” who participated in the labour market (Korsvold 2008, 78). The extension was considered a necessary initiative for continued economic growth in the welfare state. This political agenda of facilitating parental labour force participation was especially pronounced in Sweden as well as in Denmark. This has influenced the subsequent direction of day-care policy, with its emphasis on full-time rather than part-time placements in these two countries. It also means that, in both countries, children with two working parents have priority for day-care placement (Ellingsæter & Guldbrandsen 2007). Gender equality has been a less explicit objective in Norway, for example, where the family-policy model contributes to what Skrede (2004) calls “equality light”. In other words, it supports a fairly gender-segregated labour market that does not offer men any guidance about whether gender equality is primarily a women’s issue, or also an issue affecting men.

On the other hand, what is more pronounced in Norway is the concept of childcare helping to meet the needs of the individual child, and the “social-pedagogical” perspective of the child has been the main political argument behind the expansion of day-care (Leira 1992). A similar trend has also been observed in Iceland (Broddadóttir et al. 1997). However, the focus on the child is not unique to Norway and Iceland per se. In all of the Nordic countries, the objectives of care provision have been precisely to create equal opportunities for children. The Nordic day-care model is seen

as a tool for enhancing the quality of life of the individual child by ensuring that she or he experiences a good, socially developing and educational environment prior to starting school (Leira 2006; Borchorst 2002). Therefore, the quality of pre-school services and the benefit that the child derives from them have attracted increased attention. The learning and pedagogical importance of ECEC is recognised, thus relating directly to the field of educational and equality policies (e.g. Esping-Andersen 2009). E.g., the provision of ECEC is also believed to be of vital importance for the integration of first- and second-generation immigrant children and children with disabilities (OECD 2001).

Day-care in the Nordic Region is organised to reflect a joint Nordic perspective on the child. As Wagner notes (2006, 291), the Nordic countries seem to share a common ideology regarding what constitutes a good childhood and this serves a powerful driver of public policy and everyday practice in Nordic day-care centres, schools and local communities. The concept of “the good childhood” rests on the ideals of democracy, egalitarianism, freedom, emancipation, co-operation and solidarity (see also Chapter 3).

The ideology is based on an ideal model of childhood, on what Einarsdóttir calls “a romantic view of children”, in which they are happy and free, and learn from their experiences without intrusive adult supervision and interference (Einarsdóttir 2006, 172). This model presents children as subjects, not objects, in the sense that it aims to incorporate the children’s own perspectives into all aspects of the planning and implementation of pedagogic and educational initiatives. Policy statements and recommendations no longer focus on the concept of “co-operation with the child”, but rather on providing children with real influence and the opportunity to participate in the planning of their educational processes (Broström 2006, 230). For example, a Swedish evaluation report from 2008 states: “New methods for developing children’s influence have been formulated where children are more often involved in evaluations. Sensitivity and respect for children’s initiative have also increased” (Swedish National Agency for Education 2008, 22).

2.1.2 Legislative frameworks

These ambitions are also evident in the legislative frameworks, which guide the immediate and longer-term objectives for day-care provision for the individual child in the Nordic countries.

The countries share an emphasis on respect for children and for the individual child, and a belief that children learn through play and personal experience. For example, Norwegian legislation stipulates that children should be encouraged to explore, create and reflect (Day-care Institution Act, No. 64/17, June 2005).

Day-care programmes are designed to enhance social cohesion, as expressed in the Danish legislation: "As part of this objective, day-care facilities shall contribute to developing children's independence, skills in entering into committing social relations, and solidarity with and integration in the Danish society" (The Day-Care Facilities Act, No. 501 06/06/2007 authors translation).

The legislation in Iceland contains a specific language target, according to which one of the tasks of pre-schools is to provide language stimulation, with a particular emphasis on the Icelandic language (Pre-school Act, No. 90/2008).

Swedish legislation includes joint objectives for day-care services, school preparedness and all levels of school. Perhaps as a consequence of this, the legislation focuses less on the quality of childhood and play, and instead equality and citizenry aspects are emphasised: all children must have access to education and provision of education must be the same, regardless of the form of provision or geographic location (Schools Act 1985, 1100). By way of contrast, Denmark's stated objective is more pragmatic – it asserts that day-care should also provide the family with greater flexibility and choice in terms of how it wishes to organise day-care (The Day-care Facilities Act, No. 501 06/06/2007).

The range of day-care options can be based on common cultural values, such as belief in democratic – and in some cases Christian – values, as is the case in Norway and Iceland (Day-care Institution Act, No. 64/1557, June 2005; The Preschool Act, No. 90/2008). In general, however, the child should also be encouraged to be open-minded towards other cultures and, as stipulated in the Finnish legislation, learn to respect multicultural values and other religions (Act on Children's Day-care, 1 January 1973/36).

Another ideal shared by the Nordic countries is that the child should be involved in the decision-making process. The day-care system shares responsibility for the child with the parents, but must also independently help the child to evolve into a responsible citizen who is aware of the importance of democratic values and respect for others.

2.1.3 *Pedagogic principles and practice in day-to-day life*

The actual pedagogic principles applied in Nordic day-care centres were – and still are – inspired to a great extent by the German theorist Froebel and his ideals of free play and positive learning processes. According to Johansson (2006, 44), the Nordic day-care model is therefore characterised by: 1) focus on care instead of school learning; 2) aesthetic and creative subjects rather than analytical ones; 3) a thematic approach rather than actual curricula; and 4) a common, non-confessional religious orientation that does not permit corporal punishment. However, as this section will show, these principles have undergone certain changes in recent years.

As Hakkarainen (2006) notes, free play, i.e. play on the children's own initiative, enjoys a particularly privileged status in day-care policy throughout the Nordic Region. The status of play has also been ratified in many policy documents in all of the Nordic countries. Children play for play's sake, but they are also expected to learn through play. The Nordic countries therefore have a common and broad social-pedagogic definition of addressing early childhood based on a strategy that combines care, upbringing and learning without any necessary hierarchy (OECD 2006).

As shown in an ethnographic study from Iceland (Einarsdóttir 2005; 2006), the importance given to free play is particularly reflected in outdoor activities. In this study, the trained staff in the day-care centres all generally worked to create a favourable environment for play by providing ample space, time, materials and equipment, while there were variations in the extent to which, as adults, they tried to influence the play or let the children organise it themselves. However, with regard to outdoor activities, all pre-school teachers agreed that children should be able to play outside without adult involvement or interference. Both outdoor and indoor activities in Nordic day-care centres may therefore be dominated by children's own initiatives to a greater or lesser extent. As Nilsen (e.g. 2005) has also pointed out, outdoor play is not only important within the framework of day-care institutions – such activities are considered important in Nordic culture in general. It is considered to be in the child's best interest to spend as much time as possible not just outdoors, but in the wild (in fields, in forests). Indeed, several outdoor nurseries have been set up where the children spend the whole day outdoors.

Despite this emphasis on free play, the trend has clearly been toward incorporating more education into the Nordic day-care institutions, espe-

cially after the OECD's PISA surveys facilitated comparisons of the learning outcomes of elementary school children. Results from the study show that children who started their learning in kindergarten or pre-school achieved better school results (Bennet 2008).

The term "educare" is used in Finland, for example, to describe "an ECEC model of a Nordic welfare state, where care, education and instruction have been combined to form an integrated whole and where play is a central tool in pedagogical activities" (Finnish national report on the OECD study *Starting Strong* 2001). However, as Hakkarainen (2006) notes – without relating this to any development towards more education in ECEC provision – free play might, in fact, not be the substantial part of Nordic children's daily lives, as might be assumed from policy documents and the rhetoric of early-childhood educators. He notes that, in Finnish day-care institutions, play on the children's own initiative consists of a daily average of 1–2 hours out of every 8–10. Further, the staff generally spread out the free play throughout the day, in between planned activities such as eating and sleeping.

In fact, structured and formal learning remains a visible part of the day-care institutions' activities, for example through organised learning of the alphabet, which is standard practice in Danish kindergartens. Another element that binds the day-care and school systems more closely together is the emphasis on creating continuity between the two systems, via collaboration between teachers and day-care staff that transcends the different institutions. For example, the purpose of the recent reforms of the Finnish education system was to improve continuity in day-care services, especially with regard to the transition from kindergarten to primary school (Hakkarainen 2006).

The trend towards the integration of day-care and school has been met with some reluctance within social pedagogy: "ECEC services retain a strong identity distinct from the school; social pedagogy treats care, upbringing and education as an inseparable whole, and places importance on working with the whole child, broad developmental goals, interactivity with peers and educators and quality of life; and it seeks a balance between culturally valued *topics of learning* (such as music, song, dance, environmental themes) and supporting the child's meaning-making, acquired through relationships and experience of the world" (Moss 2007, 18).

Despite the trend towards the introduction of learning curricula in day-care institutions – "schoolification", as critics call it – the special Nor-

dic vision of childhood is still visible in the daily practices of day-care. Indeed, when Nordic day-care services are viewed in a broader, comparative perspective, what is perhaps even more conspicuous is that the focus is still on play versus learning, something that seems to be unique to the Nordic countries

2.1.4 Organisation

As a consequence of the growing integration of school and day-care, the administrative structure is also changing. This is not just a Nordic trend: throughout Europe, there is growing emphasis on the educational aspects of early childhood learning and childcare. This means that administrative responsibility for both age groups is often combined under a single unit or department, such as the ministry of education. This has been the case in Sweden, Norway, Spain, Italy and certain parts of Great Britain (Kamerman, 2003). Until recently, the responsibility in Denmark and Finland still belonged to the welfare ministries. However, in early 2010, Finnish day-care began to be transferred from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the Ministry of Education, supposedly to place greater emphasis on the child's perspective. In the case of Iceland, the Ministry of Education has carried out the administrative responsibilities from 1973 when the first act on day-care was enacted.

The Nordic countries remain, however, unique in terms of the high degree of decentralisation, with municipalities responsible for the interpretation and implementation of a broadly defined national policy. This contrasts with countries like Italy and France, where the central government is responsible for the learning of children in day-care from the age of three until school-starting age, while municipalities have the main responsibility for providing day-care services for children under the age of three. Within the Nordic countries, this approach supposedly ensures cooperation between the ECEC provisions and some coherence of the professional approaches across different ECEC settings (Petrie et al. 2003).

2.1.5 The social costs of day-care programmes

Is there also an element of "Nordicness" in the share of public resources spent on ECEC? Public-sector involvement in childcare services can be measured in many ways, one of which is the social spending allocated to

day-care programmes such as nurseries, kindergartens, family day-care and playgroups. Measured as a proportion of the GDP, compared to the EU-27, the Nordic countries spend a considerable amount on day-care services, especially for children aged 0–2. They spend an average of 0.64% of their GDP on this age group, compared with the EU-27 average of 0.27% of GDP (Table 2). As will be established later, part of the explanation for the higher proportions of GDP is that, in the Nordic countries, more children in this age group are in day-care programmes.

Within the Nordic countries, there is little variation in expenditure for the 0–2 age group, which includes crèches, family day-care and playgroups. Each country's position relative to the EU as a whole is illustrated with the help of standard deviation – and as Table 2 shows, the Nordic countries are all well above the EU average.¹⁷

The expenditure on kindergartens and various forms of preschool services, which are mainly for children from the age of three until school-starting age, looks different. The Nordic countries (0.38% of GDP) fall below the EU-27's average GDP spending (0.44% of GDP). Spending in Finland and Norway is even below the standard deviation for the average of all countries, while Sweden is in line with the average, and Denmark and Iceland above it.

Thus, the main difference in public spending between the Nordic countries and the 27 EU member states is that the Nordic countries' main focus is on the youngest children, as part of a policy designed to help families with dual breadwinners by making it possible for women to go out to work. While the Nordic countries devote a great deal of their resources to looking after small children, the 27 EU states make up the difference in their spending on older children, and even exceed the Nordic countries' level of spending for this age group.

¹⁷ The comparison between the Nordic countries and the EU countries is based on Lohmann et al., 2009. The method used for the standard deviations is as follows: The countries are divided up into three groups based on the calculated standard deviations: (1) $\leq -\frac{1}{2}$ of standard deviation (2) $-\frac{1}{2}$ to $+\frac{1}{2}$ standard deviation and (3) $\geq +\frac{1}{2}$ standard deviation. For each indicator, the countries are thus grouped according to their position in the overall spread between the countries.

Table 2. Social expenditure as% of GDP for ECEC services and public funding as% of all funding, most recent year

	Public expenditure ¹				Public expenditure as a share of total costs ₂			
	Day-care (2005)	SD group	Pre-primary education (2005)	SD group	0–2 year olds	SD group	3–6 year olds	SD group
Denmark	0.7	≥	0.5	≥	75	≤	75	≤
Finland	0.7	≥	0.2	≤	85	O	85	≤
Iceland	0.7	≥	0.5	≥				
Norway	0.5	≥	0.3	≤				
Sweden	0.6	≥	0.4	O	84.5	O	84.5	≤
Nordic countries, average	0.64		0.38		81.5		81.5	
EU-27	0.27 ⁴		0.44 ⁵		82.01 ⁶		93.9 ^{3,7}	
SD (EU-27)	0.22 ⁴		0.19 ⁵		7.91 ⁶		9.18 ⁷	
≤	0.16		0.35		78.05		89.31	
O	0.17–0.37		0.36–0.53		78.6–85.95		89.32–98.48	
≥	0.38		0.54		85.96		98.49	
-½ SD	-0.11		-0.10		-3.95		-4.59	
+½ SD	0.11		0.10		3.95		4.59	

Note: SD = standard deviation. 1) Source: OECD Family Database, PF10; 2) Source: Meulders & Gustafsson 2002; Plantenga & Remery 2008; Bureau 2000; 2008; 3) EU-15 only; 4) EU-27, excluding Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Slovenia; 5) EU-27, excluding Austria, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg; 6) EU-27, excluding Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia; 7) EU-27, excluding Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia.

Note: The indicators for the countries are assessed on the basis of standard deviations from the individual indicators. ≤ - ½ of standard deviation, O: - ½ to + ½ standard deviation and ≥: + ½ standard deviation. Day-care services is mainly provided for children aged 0–2 and pre-primary mainly for children from the age of three until school-starting age, but overlaps do occur. No data for Iceland and Norway, based on EU data.

2.1.6 Financing of ECEC services

Another way to interpret the public sector's commitment to day-care programmes is to study the proportion of public funding earmarked for day-care in relation to total expenditure. A common assumption regarding the Nordic countries is that public services are relatively inexpensive for the individual user, since they are mainly funded by taxation, and that the public sector therefore covers most of the direct costs.

Public funding of day-care quite rightly makes up the bulk of all the funding for the ECEC provisions in Sweden, Denmark and Finland where

data is available, but seemingly to no greater extent than in other OECD and EU-27 countries. (Table 2). Public financing of ECEC services for the smaller children aged 0-2 years makes up on average 82% of total funding in these three Nordic countries, close to the EU-15 average of 83% (Table 2).

The public funding as a proportion of all funding of ECEC provisions for the older children is, however, greater outside the three Nordic countries, at 93% in OECD countries and 94% in EU27 countries, compared to an average of 82% for the three Nordic countries, with Denmark dragging down the average, at 75%. The reason for the difference is that pre-school programs covering the school day are mostly free outside the Nordic countries with income-related fees for supplementary services, whereas ECEC services for the under 3's are charged income-related fees in all countries. Kindergartens and pre-school programmes in many other countries are mostly free, whereas income-related charges are levied for these services in the Nordic countries. Iceland is the exception to this, as reduced charges are reserved for students and single parents and are thus not income-related (Rostgaard 2004; Eydal 2008). As such, compared with the EU countries, the proportion of the total costs paid by parents is not necessarily lower in the Nordic countries.

2.1.7 Affordability

Parents can pay a considerable share of the overall costs, but are the services affordable? An important issue in the funding of ECEC provisions is to ensure that services reach the intended recipients and is affordable for everyone. High charges for parents can reduce participation in day-care programmes and can have a particularly severe impact on low-income groups, for example lone parents. Migrant parents may also be less likely to use ECEC services because of a combination of financial obstacles and cultural preferences for home based care. In Sweden, for example, children of less educated migrant parents are less likely to participate in recreational activities than children of highly educated parents born in Sweden (Swedish National Agency for Education 2005).

A commonly adopted policy is to place a national upper limit on parents' financial contribution. In spite of the de-centralised structure of service organisation and provision, this ensures some uniformity across municipalities. Regulation of fees is a widely used policy tool in the Nordic countries. In all of the Nordic countries, the amount parents are charged

must not exceed the actual costs, but in Denmark, Norway, Finland and Sweden, additional national regulations help control the maximum amount payable (see Table 3). Other rules may provide discounts for low-income groups or siblings. The amount may also depend on the number of hours the child spends in day-care.

Overall, the payment ceiling is lowest in Sweden, where charges vary according to the number of children in the family and the time spent in the day-care centre, as well as between local municipalities (NOSOSCO 2007–8, 2009; Plantenga & Remery 2008). The Swedish ceiling is fixed at 3% of household income, with a maximum of EUR 130 (SEK 1,260) per month (Plantenga & Remery 2008), or 4.5% of the average net wages (after tax) (average wage = AW) (Table 3).

In Finland, the government has set the maximum charge at EUR 233 per month for full-day-care, or 8% after tax. The calculations also take into account the size of the family.

In Norway, the maximum was EUR 269 (NOK 2,330) per month in 2009 (or 4.7% of average earnings after tax), but a recent reform will reduce this over a number of years to EUR 209 (NOK 1,750) in order to guarantee access for low-income families. Norway also offers a free programme for parts of the day (*free core time*) at day-care centres in areas with a high concentration of immigrant families.

The Danish government has determined that parents should pay a maximum of 30% of the budgeted costs. The monthly payment in 2010 was on average EUR 365 euros (DKK 2,665) for a crèche (0–2), or 9.4% of average earnings after tax, and EUR 226 (DKK 1,648) or 5.8% after tax for kindergarten (3–6), but the figures differ significantly from one local municipality to another. A place in nursery care can cost EUR 247–506 (DKK 1,800–3,692), and a kindergarten slot EUR 178–314 (DKK 1,300–2,290). This does not include sibling discounts or rebates for low-income groups. In other words, Denmark has the highest maximum payment for day-care.

Table 3. Rules and parents' contribution, 2008.

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
Set centrally or locally	Centrally	Centrally	Locally	Centrally	Centrally
Maximum contribution by parents, per month	Depending on type of care, max. 30% of budgeted costs. Average EUR 226–365 (DKK 2,666–1,648) ¹	EUR 233	Must not exceed actual costs	EUR 269 (NOK 1,660) (EUR 209 [NOK 1,750])	EUR 130 (SEK 1,260)
As% of AW after tax	9.4% / 5.8%	8.0%	-	4.7%	4.5%
Rules for discounts for low-income families?	Yes, national	Yes, national	Sometimes, local rules	Sometimes, local rules	Yes, national
Sibling discounts?	Yes	Yes	In most local municipalities	Yes	Yes
Free-of-cost places available?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Charges as a proportion of total operating costs	20%	11%	16%	20%	10%

All local municipalities must set rules to reduce or waive payment for low-income families.

Source: NOSOSCO 2009, p. 63 and authors' own calculations of the charges in Denmark, based on information provided by local municipalities. Average income in 2007 is calculated by NOSOSCO (NOSOSCO 2006–7, 2009, pp. 212–213).^{*} For further information about NOSOSCO's calculations of average income, see <http://nososco-eng.nom-nos.dk/filer/publikationer/tabeller/descrtyp07.pdf>. See also Table 3 of this report on average income.

All of the Nordic countries except Iceland have national rules regarding sibling discounts (Table 3). In Sweden, for example, the ceiling for siblings is 2% of household income for the second child and 1% for the third, with maximum monthly payments of EUR 86 and EUR 43, respectively (Plantenga & Remery 2008).

Besides setting ceilings for parents, all of the Nordic countries have a policy of reducing costs for low-income or socially disadvantaged families. Charges can even be waived completely, though not in Sweden or Iceland (Table 3), where this policy has not been implemented.

While all local municipalities in Denmark, Sweden and Finland use income-based charges, many local municipalities in Norway have responded to the introduction of a ceiling by abandoning the principle of income regulation. Only 23% of local municipalities in Norway now use income-based charges. The others use fixed amounts that are independent of fami-

ly income. In general, the ceiling seems to have benefited high-income families, who are more likely to take up expensive places in private institutions, while low-income families now have to pay more (Plantenga & Remery 2008). In Iceland, the individual local municipality sets the charges, and discounts are not based on income, unless paid out in the form of social assistance benefits. Lone parents and students, however, normally pay less compared with two-parent families (Eydal 2008).

2.1.8 *The right to day-care*

Parents may be able to afford day-care, but the question remains whether facilities are available. Most of the Nordic countries now guarantee the statutory right to day-care for children at the end of parental leave – a right rarely found in other comparable countries (Lohmann et al. 2009).

Apart from Iceland, all of the Nordic countries have enacted legislation conferring the right to day-care in the form of a care guarantee. For example, since 1996, Finnish parents have had an unconditional right to municipally organised day-care for children under the age of seven. Finland was the first country in the world to enact legislation of this kind. However, municipalities are not always in a position to meet the demand for places. This seems to be a widespread problem, and arises in particular when a place is needed quickly and/or parents wish to move (Plantenga & Remery 2008).

In 1995, Sweden tried to solve the problem of long waiting lists by passing a law requiring local municipalities to provide placement in an institution “without unreasonable delay” – meaning within three to four months. In 2005, almost all (98%) local municipalities were able to assign a placement within this timeframe (Swedish National Agency for Education 2005). A similar law was passed in Denmark, where municipalities must offer children aged six months and older placement within four weeks of joining the waiting list.

In Norway, the advent of the new red-green coalition in 2005 paved the way for a policy shift, and the availability of day-care came into focus, while the cash-for-care programme was reserved for 1–2-year-olds (Platform for government by the Labour Party, Socialist Left Party and Centre Party 2005). Since 1 January 2009, children in Norway have had a statutory right to day-care from the age of one year (Act amending the Day-care Institution Act [Right to a kindergarten placement], No. 73, 2008-08-08). In Iceland, all children have the right to be on a waiting list for a place-

ment, and the local municipalities are obliged to offer the requisite number of places, but there is no statutory right to day-care.

The right to day-care should not be interpreted as a right conferred upon the child, but may, as is the case in Denmark, be based on the parents being active on the labour market. In Sweden, the guarantee covers all children whose parents are employed, studying, on leave or unemployed. However, since 2003, all Swedish children aged four and over have had an individual right to 15 hours of day-care per week. The day-care guarantee can be interpreted as a way of practising universalism, because in principle, every child should have access to day-care. In practice, it has also often been a way for national governments to ensure that local municipalities provide the necessary level of services. In Denmark, for example, this takes the form of allowing municipalities the right to increase the parents' share of the total costs, if the municipality reciprocates by introducing a childcare guarantee.

2.1.9 Utilisation of day-care programmes

Another characteristic of the Nordic childcare model is that so many children under the age of three receive care outside the family. This is perhaps not surprising when one considers how the dual-breadwinner model is promoted, and that the childcare guarantee starts at the end of parental leave. Looking at enrolment in day-care and educational services for children, which encompasses arrangements under welfare as well as educational authorities, and private as well as public services, reveals that, with the exception of Finland (22.4%), the coverage in the Nordic countries is far above the EU average for this age group, albeit with considerable variation (39.5–61.7%) (Table 4). By way of comparison, the average for this age group in the EU-27 is 19.6%, a considerable way from the 33% figure that EU member states have pledged to meet by the year 2010 under the Lisbon targets.

Generally, however, there seem to be major differences in the provision of day-care by local municipalities in the Nordic countries – for example in Norway, in 2006, local municipal coverage varied between 30–100% (Plantenga & Remery 2008) – and waiting lists are particularly common in cities where families with children proliferate (e.g. Helsingin Sanomat 2007; City of Copenhagen 2009).

Although coverage for younger children in the Nordic countries is well above the EU average, the point at which the child begins day-care varies greatly. Danish children commonly begin day-care at the end of parental leave (Rostgaard 2004; NOSOSCO 2007–8, 2009), whereas only 40% of Finnish children aged 3–6 are enrolled (Repo 2010).

If we look at coverage across the Nordic Region for children aged between three years and school-starting age, the Nordic lead vanishes, as the countries' coverage is very similar to the EU-27 average of 77.6%. However, all of the Nordic countries, with the exception of Finland, are significantly above the average standard deviation (coverage of 86.1–94.7% of the age group) (Table 4), but not always above the Lisbon target of 90% of the age group.

Table 4. Total day-care enrolment,% of all children, 2004

	Enrolment in day-care			
	Enrolment among children aged 0–2 (2004)	SD group	Enrolment among children aged 3–6 (2004)	SD group
Denmark	61.7	≥	89.7	≥
Finland	22.4	O	46.1	≤
Iceland	58.7	≥	94.7	≥
Norway	43.7	≥	85.1	O
Sweden	39.5	≥	86.6	O
Nordic countries	45.2		80.4	
EU-27	19.59 ¹		77.56 ¹	
SD (EU-27)	14.94 ¹		18.69 ¹	
≤	12.12		68.22	
O	12.13–27.05		68.23–86.90	
≥	27.06		86.91	
-½ SD	-7.47		-9.34	
+½ SD	7.47		9.34	

Source: Lohmann, Rostgaard & Spiess 2009.

EU-27, excluding Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Slovenia.

The indicators for the countries are assessed on the basis of standard deviations from the special indicators. ≤ - ½ of standard deviation, O: - ½ to + ½ standard deviation and ≥: + ½ standard deviation.

A closer look at the age-differentiated enrolment in day-care over recent decades shows that the Nordic countries' policy of extending the day-care strategy applies to both younger and older children, and highlights how different the national starting points were in the mid-1990s (Table 5).

Table 5 Day-care enrolment in the Nordic countries,% of different age groups, 1995–2008

		1995	2000	2008
Denmark	< 1	NA	15	17
	1–2	48	77	90
	3–5	83	92	97
Finland	< 1	NA	2	1
	1–2	18	35	42
	3–5	55	72	73
Iceland	< 1	NA	7	7
	1–2	37	59	79
	3–5	64	92	95
Norway	< 1	NA	2	4
	1–2	22	37	75
	3–5	61	78	96
Sweden	< 1	NA	0	0
	1–2	37	60	70
	3–5	74	86	97

Source: NOSOSCO 2007–8, 2009. NA = not available.

Table 5 shows that day-care enrolment among children under the age of one year is minimal in all of the countries as a consequence of the length of parental leave, but also because of the cultural perception that parents should care for the child during his or her first year of life. A certain variation between countries is discernible, but it suggests that, in Denmark, day-care outside of the family is a more accepted part of childhood. In 2008, one child in six (17%) in Denmark was in day-care before the age of one, compared to 1–7% in the other Nordic countries.

Denmark has led the way in day-care enrolment over the years, not only among children under one, but also among 1–2-year-olds, of whom 48% were in day-care in mid-1995, compared with 18–37% in the other Nordic countries. In 2008, nine out of ten Danish children aged 2–3 were in day-care. In this age group, Finland in particular lags behind, with 42% (Table 5). However, part of the explanation for this is the variation in the length of parental leave in the Nordic countries (see also Chapter 1 on parental leave) and in the cash-for-care schemes available for home-based child-care (see also Section 2 of this chapter).

In all of the Nordic countries, the range of day-care for children aged 3–5 has always been higher than for younger children, perhaps in part due to historical roots in the German kindergarten tradition. In 1995, this figure was highest in Denmark (83%) and lowest in Norway (61%). Gradually, the other

Nordic countries have reached the same level of day-care provision as Denmark in 2008, when almost all children aged 3–5 attended day-care, with the same level of enrolment in Sweden (97%), and nearly the same in Norway (96%) and Iceland (95%), while Finland lagged behind with 73%.

2.1.10 Full-time care

Another apparently unique Nordic feature is the provision of full-time care for the younger children. In Denmark and Finland at least, the day-care available to children aged 0–2 is mainly full-time care. In Denmark, 90% of children aged 0–2 are enrolled in full-time care, while in Finland this figure is 81%. Both countries are well above the average for all of the countries in Table 6. The trend in Iceland has also moved towards full-time care (Landshagir 2009). The average for the EU-27 is 60.5% for children aged 0–2 in full-time care.

Older children between the ages of three years and school-starting age also tend to be in all-day-care in the Nordic countries – 83% in Denmark and 73% in Finland, again, above the average. This, however, corresponds to the situation in many other comparable EU countries, where, on average, 58% of children in this age group are enrolled in full-time day-care. Thus, the scope of full-time childcare services for children in this age group cannot be considered a particularly Nordic phenomenon.

Table 6. Prevalence of full-time care as% of children in day-care

	Full-time day-care			
	Proportion aged 0–2 in full-time care	SD group	Proportion aged 3–6 in full-time care	SD group
Denmark	90	≥	83	≥
Finland	81	≥	73	≥
Sweden	61	O	63	O
EU-27	60.52 ¹		58.41 ²	
SD (EU-27)	26.61 ¹		26.30 ²	
≤	47.22		45.26	
O	47.23–73.82		45.27–71.55	
≥	73.83		71.56	
-½ SD	-13.30		-13.15	
+½ SD	13.30		13.15	

Source: Lohmann, Rostgaard & Spiess 2009. 1) EU-27, excluding Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia; 2) EU-27, excluding Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovenia. Note: No data for Norway or Iceland.

2.1.11 Family day-care or day-care centre?

Day-care can be provided either in an institutional setting or in the form of family day-care. In the latter, children are cared for in a home environment, often with 3–5 children aged 0–6. Mainly the youngest children are looked after in this way, often because their parents see it as better suited to the children’s needs, or because the parents are waiting for a placement in a day-care centre. However, family day-care is also popular in rural areas, where running a centre is not always financially viable because of the small number of children.

All of the Nordic countries offer family day-care. Family day-care employed, paid, trained and authorised by the local municipality to look after children in their own homes. Parents pay for this service, just as they would for a place in a day-care centre (NOSOSCO 2007–8, 2009). In Iceland, however, the individual local municipality sets the price for family day-care, which may differ from the price of a day-care centre (Eydal 2008). There are also privately run family day-care initiatives, but these are often omitted from the statistics.

The statistics for family day-care arrangements are less comprehensive than for institutions. There is no comparable Nordic data on family day-care enrolment – only national figures are available – and the numbers are not always according to age. Table 7 shows the number of children enrolled in family day-care services and the proportion of all children in day-care, including in centres, in four of the Nordic countries in 2005.

Table 7. Children in family day-care, number and proportion of the total number of children in day-care, 2005, various age groups

	0–2		3–6		0–6	
	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion
Denmark	64,191	53	955	1	308,221	21
Finland	NA	NA	NA	NA	53,664	30
Iceland	1,695	13	27	0.2	1,722	6
Norway	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	10,434	5
Sweden	11,314	8	19,262	7	29,599	7

Note: Norway: Both private and public family day-care services.

SCB 2007 and 2008; Swedish National Agency for Education 2008; STAKES 2007; Statistics Denmark 2009; Landshagir 2009.

As Table 7 shows, there is a considerable difference between the countries in how many children aged 0–6 are cared for by family day-care providers – 30% of children in day-care are looked after by family day-care providers in Finland, followed by Denmark (22%), Sweden (7%) and Norway (5%). Age-differentiated data is available for Denmark, Iceland and Sweden, and Table 7 shows that family day-care is the preferred form of care for children aged 0–2 in Denmark, while significantly fewer Swedish children in this age group are in the care of family day-care providers.

2.1.12 The quality of ECEC

While choice and cost are important, presumably parents also take quality into consideration in choosing a childcare option for their child. Quality can be measured in many ways, but one quantitative parameter often used in the academic literature is the relationship between the number of children and the number of staff, which outlines how many adults work with a given group of children – the assumption being that the fewer children per adult, the higher the quality. What little comparative data is available reveals that there is often variation between the age groups. Table 8 shows data for the Nordic countries compared to the average in the number of EU states for which we have data.

The ratio of children per adult, seen as an average across different types of institutions, is generally lower for children aged 0–2 (Table 8). Among the Nordic countries, the staff–child ratio for this age group in day-care was lowest in Denmark, with 3.3 children per employee. The average ratio in Finland for children aged 0–2 years was also relatively low, with relatively many adults per child. In Norway, only the ratio for the 3–6 age group was available, and here the number of children per employee was higher than the average for all 27 EU states.

Table 8. Quality indicators for day-care, proportion of trained staff and staff–child ratio

Personnel			Average number of children per adult							
			Day-care				Pre-school scheme			
More than 80% of staff are trained	More than 50% of staff have completed relevant higher education		0–3	SD group	3–6	SD group	0–6	SD group	0–6	SD group
Denmark	No	Yes	3.3	≤	7.2	0			6.9	≤
Finland	Yes	No	4.0	0	7.0	≤			12.7	0
Iceland	Yes	Yes							7.3	≤
Norway	No	No			8.0	≥				
Sweden	Yes	Yes					5.5	≤	11.2	≤
EU-27			4.47 ¹		7.4 ²		7.7 ³		13.84 ⁴	
SD			1.18 ¹		0.53 ²		1.91 ³		3.08 ⁴	
≤			3.88		7.14		6.75		12.30	
0			3.89–5.05		7.15–7.65		6.76–8.64		12.31–15.37	
≥			5.06		7.66		8.65		15.38	
-½ SD			-0.59		-0.26		-0.95		-1.54	
+½ SD			0.59		0.26		0.95		1.54	

Source: Lohmann, Rostgaard & Spiess 2009. 1) EU-27, excluding Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden; 2) Denmark, Finland, UK; 3) EU-27, excluding Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, UK. 7) EU-27, excluding Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia.

As Kristjansson (2006) notes, the Nordic countries consistently place high demands on the level of education expected of childcare staff, as it is believed that well-trained personnel are instrumental in ensuring high quality. Less emphasis might, however, be placed today on the special needs of young children, as reforms of teacher education in Sweden and Denmark within the last 10 to 15 years have marked an end to the separate and distinctive education of pre-school teachers (Johansson 2006). These programmes have been merged with the overall “social educator” programme, and at present there is little focus on the special philosophies and practices that are applicable to the development of the youngest children. In Finland and Iceland, and to a lesser extent in Norway, the traditional training programmes for kindergarten teachers remain intact. The programmes also differ with respect to the demands placed on students. A kindergarten teacher in Finland and Iceland must complete a Master’s

degree (a five-year programme), although this has not yet entered into force in Iceland (Act on education and employment of teachers and administrators at pre-schools, primary schools and secondary schools, No. 87/2008). The programmes in Denmark, Norway and Sweden are still at the lower Bachelor level.

It is also common practice in the Nordic countries to recruit staff with lower or less relevant qualifications. In Finland and Norway, there is a growing trend to allow unskilled and partially qualified staff to work on their own and take on responsibilities without supervision from professionally trained staff, as was previously the case. Nevertheless, according to OECD data, 80% or more of employees in Finland, Iceland and Sweden have a certain degree of training. Additionally, 50% or more of employees in Denmark, Iceland and Sweden have completed higher education (Table 9). Einarsdóttir (2006, p.161) notes, however, that in 2004 only 28% of pedagogic staff in Icelandic pre-schools were certified pre-school teachers – this is reflected in the fact that the most highly trained staff work in administrative positions, while the least trained work with children.

2.1.13 A Nordic model of ECEC services

Overall, there are many apparent similarities in the day-care systems of the Nordic countries that stand out: for example, the role of (full-) time day-care in the facilitation of the dual earner/dual carer model; the policy goals and practices that (continue to) emphasise play; the introduction of social rights to day-care; and the relatively high take-up rates for children aged 0–2. On the other hand, it is worth noting that in some areas, the Nordic model is less immediately obvious. For example, the fact that day-care is tax funded is not significantly reflected in a lower share of costs for parents, compared with other European countries. In addition, enrolment among children aged three to school-starting age is just as high in many other European countries. Further, the quality of care – at least when somewhat simplistically viewed through the staff–child ratio – is not necessarily higher in the Nordic countries. There are also significant differences in enrolment between the different countries, suggesting that despite general support for publicly funded day-care outside the family, the so-called “defamilisation” of childcare (Leira 2006) is more evident in some countries than in others. Part of the explanation is that the Nordic countries differ in terms of the way support is provided for home-based

care as an alternative to day-care institutions. As the following section illustrates, there are significant differences between the Nordic countries with regard to the supply and demand for cash-for-care.

2.2 Cash grants for care

Besides providing ECEC and paid parental leave, the Nordic countries have all developed what this report refers to as “cash-for-care”, i.e. payments to parents of young children that start after paid parental leave and last until the child has been enrolled full time in public day-care (usually at the age of three). Cash-for-care has come under fire for militating against the most important objectives of Nordic gender-equality policy, as well as for prolonging the period mothers spend away from work (Ellingsæter & Leira 2006; Rantalaaho 2009). It is also claimed that cash-for-care is not in the interests of children with a particular need for day-care (see further discussion of the criticism of the cash-for-care benefit in its entirety in Chapter 4, on policy, and Chapter 3, on children’s best interest).

Cash-for-care is not usually accorded priority in comparative research, where the Nordic model’s special characteristics are deemed to be relatively well-paid parental leave and a wide range of public-sector day-care services compared with other European countries (e.g. Esping-Andersen 1999; Gornick & Meyers 2003; Hantrais 2004). Within the Nordic Region, comparative studies of cash-for-care have concentrated on Finland and Norway, as such schemes have only recently been launched in Denmark and Sweden (e.g. Ellingsæter & Leira 2006; Hiilamo & Kangas 2006; Rantalaaho 2009; Sipilä et al. 2010). The following section looks at cash-for-care in the Nordic countries, reviewing the purpose, most important characteristics, length, amounts paid and prevalence of such programmes.

2.2.1 History, objectives and administration of cash-for-care programmes in the Nordic countries

In 1985, Finland became the first Nordic country to adopt a national cash-for-care system. Since 1990, the parents of all children under the age of three have had the right to choose between day-care and a child home-care allowance. The importance of parental choice was on the agenda in Finland as far back as the 1960s. Back then, the emphasis was on the idea

that mothers – and later, both parents – should have the opportunity to opt for care at home or care in a day-care facility (Salmi 2006). In addition to the importance of choice, equality between both parents was also cited as a reason for the introduction of the first programmes – for example, it was stressed that parents in rural areas often had no access to day-care (Rantalaiho 2009). As well as the national cash-for-care system, municipalities are also entitled to provide a local supplement (Kela – Social Insurance Institution of Finland, n.d.).

In the 1990s, Sweden and Denmark both introduced cash-for-care programmes that were completely different in nature, and were both subsequently scrapped (Child Care Allowance Act, No. 1994:553; Rostgaard 2002).

In 1998, Norway enacted legislation providing the right to cash-for-care (*Kontantstøtte*), a subsidy for parents of children under the age of three who wanted to care for them at home. The aim was to improve parental choice and create greater equality between those families who made use of state-subsidised day-care centres and those who did not (Act concerning cash benefits for parents with small children [the Cash Benefit Act] No. 73/1997-8). A further important objective was to enable parents to spend more time with their children (Ellingsæter 2006). The programme is state funded, and all parents in Norway are entitled to this benefit.

Following the Danish government's revision of childcare policy in the early 2000s (Rostgaard 2002; Wehener & Abrahamson 2008), local municipalities were again empowered to pay a subsidy to those wishing to care for their own children (*Tilskud til pasning af egne børn*). In Denmark, municipalities fund the programme, so municipal participation is at the discretion of the local council. In its bill, the Danish government underlined the need to allow families the flexibility and choice to organise work and childcare in accordance with their own needs and desires, but the law also offers municipalities greater flexibility in the provision of childcare. Local municipalities fund the programme and parents need to apply locally (Provision of Day-care Act, No. 501 2007/06/06).

In 2008, Sweden also adopted a new scheme of cash-for-care (*Vårdnadsbidraget*) (Municipal child home-care allowance act, No. 2008, 307). The main argument was the importance of families being able to choose between day-care and home care. The Swedish cash-for-care scheme is an alternative available to local municipalities (Ministry of Health and Social

Affairs 2007). (Since each local council is empowered to set their own rules, the rules for the programme in Stockholm will be discussed later.)

Iceland differs from the other countries because it has not adopted national legislation on cash-for-care schemes. However, since 2006, some local municipalities have introduced their own local programmes, which they fund themselves. By December 2009, 13 out of 77 local councils had introduced child cash-for-care schemes (Rannsóknastofnun um barna og fjölskylduvernd 2010). The scheme's name, objectives and entitlement criteria vary significantly from one municipality to another, so the Reykjavík programme will be used as an example in the following section. The main purpose of the programme in Reykjavík was to create equality, between fathers and mothers, and between those parents whose children have a day-care placement and those still waiting for one (City of Reykjavík, n.d.).

Although systems of cash-for-care existed in all of the Nordic countries in 2009, they differ significantly with regard to the point in time at which they were introduced, their objectives, and the way in which they are administered (Table 9).

Table 9. Nordic cash-for-care programmes, legislation, objectives, funding and administrative level in 2009

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
National legislation?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Year	2002	1985	(2005)	1998	2008
Funded by	Local municipalities	The state	Local municipalities	The state	The state
Implemented by	Local municipalities	State and local municipalities	Local municipalities	The state	Local municipalities
Main objective	Freedom of choice	Freedom of choice/ (originally also equality)	Equality	Choice/ Equality/ More time for the family	Freedom of choice

Four of the five Nordic countries have adopted national legislation on cash-for-care. However, both the timing of the introduction and the objectives behind the programmes vary widely. The fact that the legislation has been adopted at different times is particularly relevant in the case of Finland, where the programme is not only an important part of childcare policy, but has also been around for a quarter of a century. The programmes in the other countries are more recent – the oldest of these is the Norwegian system, which was introduced in 1998. The objectives of the

programmes also vary from country to country. In Denmark, Finland and Sweden, the emphasis is first and foremost on the importance of giving parents the option of choosing between different forms of childcare. The Norwegians, too, stressed parental choice, but as with Reykjavík, equality between parents was also an important argument.

The fact that the programmes in both Norway and Finland were introduced within the framework of the state, as part of the national social security system, signifies a fundamental difference, as Denmark, Sweden and Iceland introduced their programmes within the framework of municipalities. The following section compares and discusses the entitlement to and use of the programmes.

2.2.2 Availability and duration

Who is paid for what, and for how long? Table 10 shows the different rules on child home-care allowances, or cash-for-care, in the Nordic countries – or, in the case of Denmark and Iceland, for their capital cities. The table also shows the different requirements related to the child’s age, parents’ employment status and parents’ opportunities to take advantage of part-time day-care services and child home-care allowance for part-time care.

Table 10. The Nordic countries: Rules for child home-care allowances (cash-for-care) in 2009

	Finland	Norway	Sweden	Copenhagen	Reykjavik
Child’s age	1–3	1–3	250 days– 3 years	6 months–3 years	6/9 months–2 years
Part-time day-care + partial payments of cash-for-care?	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Can it be used to pay others?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No, but other programmes exist	Yes
Universal, for all parents regardless of type of income?	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes

Provision of Day-care Act No. 501 06/06/2007; Municipal child home-care allowance act, No.2008:307; Cash Benefit Act no. 73/1997-8; Kela – Social Insurance Institution of Finland, n.d.,a; City of Reykjavík, n.d.

There is a certain similarity between the cash-for-care programmes in Finland, Norway and Sweden: Benefits can be paid to the parents until the child turns three without requirements about who looks after the child, i.e. whether it is the parents themselves or someone they pay to look after the child. However, both the Norwegian and Swedish systems are more

flexible than the Finnish system, as parents are able to choose to combine cash benefits with part-time care in an institution, which is not the case in Finland (Ellingsæter & Leira 2006; Salmi 2006; Municipal child home-care allowance act, No. 2008:307). In Sweden, the rules for eligibility differ from those in Norway and Finland. Child home-care allowance in Sweden is not paid to parents who receive unemployment or sickness benefits, those on paid parental leave, receiving asylum-seeker allowances or state pensions (Proposal for the Municipal child home-care allowance act, Prop. 2007/08:91; Municipal child home-care allowance act, No. 2008:307).

In Denmark, municipalities can decide to adopt a cash-for care scheme and determine the benefit amount (except that it cannot exceed 85% of the lowest net cost of an all-day placement in a day-care centre). National rules emphasise that parents of children aged six months to three years can only apply for the allowance if they have applied for a place in a day-care institution or family day-care. The benefits can be paid for a minimum of eight weeks and a maximum of one year, and within the first eight weeks, the local municipality is supposed to conduct a pedagogical evaluation of the family to assess whether the child would derive greater benefit from special support in a day-care facility. The parent to whom the benefit is paid must not be in receipt of any other form of employment-related benefit, such as cash benefits, student loans or unemployment benefit, and must not be in paid employment. The other parent must also not be a recipient of cash benefits or other social benefits that require availability for work (The Law on Active Social Policy, No. 709 AF 08/13/2003). If the parents no longer wish to avail themselves of cash-for-care, the municipality must offer a place in a day-care centre instead (Ministry of the Interior and Social Affairs 2009, The Day-care Act, No. 501 06/06/2007).

In Iceland, because of the absence of national legislation on cash-for-care, municipalities decide whether to introduce such a subsidy, and draw up their own rules. The example cited here is the programme in Reykjavík, known as “service insurance”, under which parents who cohabit are entitled to childcare subsidies when the child is nine months old, or six months for single parents. As in the case in Copenhagen, parents in Reykjavík have to apply for a day-care place to be eligible for the cash-for-care, so the programme is seen primarily as bridging the gap between those who have been allocated a pre-school place and those who have not. In other words, it is not designed as a measure to increase parental choice. The parents have the right to the benefit until the child has been offered a

place in day-care or turns two. Only in cases where the local council fails to allocate a day-care place will the benefit be paid to children older than two. The rules give parents the right to use the cash to pay a third party to look after the child. Finally, Reykjavík has one condition that is quite unusual in terms of cash-for-care benefits: in the case of cohabiting/married parents, the parents have to divide the payments in accordance with the rules on the division of paid parental leave. Thus, one parent can only receive two-thirds of the total months paid, and the other parent a minimum of one-third (City of Reykjavík 2008). It is not possible to regulate how parents actually divide up the care between them, but the message is loud and clear – the city encourages both parents to participate in child-care (Rannsóknastofnun um barna- og fjölskylduvernd 2010).¹⁸

All of the countries employ systems of cash-for-care or child home-care allowances designed to provide care for children at home up to the age of three, with the exception of Iceland, specifically Reykjavík, where the allowance is only paid until the child turns two. In Sweden and Norway, parents are able to choose to send their children to a day-care centre part time and receive an allowance for home-based care – this is not possible in Finland, Copenhagen or Reykjavík. Parental rights also vary from country to country. Denmark imposes stricter requirements, not only in terms of the parents' income, but also that both parents must not be in paid work at the same time. In Sweden, if both parents receive certain benefits from the social security system, they are no longer eligible to receive cash-for-care – but they can be in paid employment at the same time as receiving a child home-care allowance.

2.2.3 *The amount of cash-for-care*

In most cases, the amount paid is not enough to support a family – it is far lower than what working parents receive during paid parental leave. One of the reasons why cash-for-care has been criticised is that it is said to keep mothers away from working life for prolonged periods because fami-

¹⁸ From 1st of April 2011 the scheme was abolished as part of cuts to expenditure in Reykjavik in the aftermath of the economic crisis that hit Iceland in autumn 2008.

lies would lose too much income if fathers took leave instead (see also the discussion in Chapter 4, on politics).

Table 11 shows how the child home-care allowance can be paid as an alternative to day-care, calculated as a percentage of the average employee's income in each country after tax (Average Wage, AW). The Nordic Social-Statistical Committee (NOSOSCO) calculated the average wages.

Table 11. Rates for cash benefits for childcare at home, % of average earnings (AW in 2007) in the Nordic countries, 2009

	AW 2007 per month*	Cash benefit per month 2009	Cash benefit as% of AW
Copenhagen	DKK 28,264	DKK 7,033	24.8
Finland**	EUR 2,906	EUR 314.28	10.8
Reykjavik	ISK 289,641	ISK 35,000	12
Norway	NOK 35,065	NOK 3,303	9.4
Sweden	SEK 28,068	SEK 3,000	10.7

*AW 2007 was calculated by NOSOSCO (NOSOSCO 2008, 2009, pp. 212–213). For further information about NOSOSCO's AW calculations, see <http://nososco-eng.nos-nos.dk/filer/publikationer/tabeller/descrtyp07.pdf>

** The basic amount for one child. It may be increased for low-income families who receive supplementary income-related benefits and/or if the municipality pays extra benefits. See the discussion below.

In four out of the five countries, the systems do not differ significantly in terms of amounts, and amount to about 10% of the income of an average wage earner. In Copenhagen, the rate is considerably higher, around 25% of average income. However, it is important to remember that parents in Copenhagen are not allowed to have a second income while receiving cash-for-care.

It is also important to note that even though the basic benefit in Finland is EUR 314 per month for one child (as of 1 May 2009), an extra EUR 94 may be paid for each sibling under the age of three in a household, and EUR 60 for each sibling aged between three and seven. In addition, the benefit can be supplemented with a maximum of EUR 168 per month, depending on the size of the family and its income¹⁹ (Kela – Social Insurance Institution of Finland, *ibid.*, a). Some municipalities also pay a child

¹⁹ There is another programme, Grants for Private Day-care, which provides a standard amount of EUR 160 for private day-care for children up to school age and an amount of up to EUR 134, depending on family size and income (Kela – Social Insurance Institution of Finland, *ibid.*, b).

home-care allowance for childcare outside of the home, to parents who do not avail themselves of their right to a day-care place, but both the amount and the rules vary from one municipality to another (Rantalaiho 2009). In Finland, child home-care allowances are taxed and treated as additional income when calculating financial support for students. The amount can also be deducted from unemployment benefits, but if both parents are unemployed, it is only subtracted from the parent who received the child home-care allowance. Similarly, if one parent stays at home with the child and does not seek work, the spouse's unemployment benefit is not affected (Kela – Social Insurance Institution of Finland, no date).

In Copenhagen, the monthly payment is DKK 7,033 per child before taxes (City of Copenhagen, no date). A parent may receive cash for a maximum of three children in the same household, and the total amount must not exceed the unemployment benefit (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs 2007).

In both Norway and Sweden, the benefits are the same for everyone, but if the child has a part-time place in a day-care centre, the payment is adjusted according to the amount of time the child spends there. In Reykjavík, the benefits are the same for everyone. In all three cases, the benefits are not subject to taxation (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, *ibid.*; Municipal child home-care allowance act, No. 2008:307; City of Reykjavík, no date).

2.2.4 Prevalence and utilisation of cash-for-care schemes

Despite the fact that NOSOSCO collates a large volume of statistical material on social affairs in the Nordic countries, which is published by the Nordic Council of Ministers, there are no comparative statistics on the prevalence of cash-for-care (NOSOSCO 2007–8, 2009). As a result, the statistics presented in this section are all national.

Cash benefits for at-home childcare are popular among parents in Finland, and in 2008, more than half of all children under three years old (56.9%) were cared for at home under this programme (Kela – Social Insurance Institution of Finland *ibid.*, d). In most cases, the benefit was paid to the mother (e.g. Salmi 2006). The Finnish family-leave survey of 2001–2 asked whether the child home-care allowance should be scrapped, and only 17 out of 3,295 female respondents supported the idea. In other

words, Finnish women are strong supporters of the programme (Salmi 2006). The key question related to how long the programme is used is often whether the mother has a permanent job to return to, as well as whether jobs are available to a mother who has taken leave from a temporary job or has no previous work experience. If the mother had a fixed-term job prior to her leave, then there is a great probability that she will use the system for a long time (Salmi, Lammi-Taskula & Narfe 2009).

In general, young women (usually students) and immigrant women have greater trouble finding jobs (Haataja 2010). A survey of users from 2006 shows that the child home-care allowance is more frequently paid to young, single mothers aged 20–34 than married, cohabiting and/or older (35+) mothers. Foreign-born mothers also apply for the child home-care allowance slightly more often than those born in Finland. Repo (2010, 47) also points out that income regulation in the Finnish subsidy system creates a financial incentive for low-income families.

In Norway, the cash-for-care benefit was quite popular when it was introduced, but the expansion of day-care means that fewer children are now being cared for through the programme. In 1999, 74.3% of children aged 1–3 were looked after with the help of the child home-care allowance, but this percentage fell to 34.9% in 2008 (Statistical Yearbook 2009, Table 143). A 1999 study of Norwegian mothers of small children found that they would have liked to spend more time with their children, but that they did not want the cash-for-care benefit in order to achieve this – they would have preferred longer paid parental leave and shorter working hours (Hellevik & Koren 2000).

The high rate of utilisation of cash-for-care seems, therefore, to have been not only a matter of free choice, but also a consequence of the fact that public-sector day-care was incapable of meeting demand (Leira 2002; Lauritzen 2005). Throughout the 2000s, the provision of public day-care places options increased and the use of the child home-care allowance diminished (e.g. Ellingsæter & Guldbrandsen 2005). According to Statistics Norway (2010), day-care is most common for children aged 1–2, rising from 43% in 2004 to 68% in 2008. This increase in the take-up is related both to income and to education – the higher the family's income, the more likely it is that children will attend a day-care institution rather than being cared for at home under the cash-for-care scheme. The smallest increase was found among children from the lowest- and highest-income families. Statistics Norway (2007) also reported that it is more common

for children of parents born in Norway to be in day-care, compared with children of parents born outside the country.

In the majority of cases when cash-for-care is paid in Norway, it is the mother who is the child's main caregiver. According to Rønsen (2005), after the introduction of the cash-for-care, the number of hours worked by mothers in Norway fell by 3.75 hours (compared to 1.2 hours for fathers) in the period 1998–2002. Similarly, the percentage of working mothers fell from 62–63% in 1998 to 56% in 2002. By way of comparison, the percentage of working fathers fell from 95% to 93% during the same period. Statistics Norway (2007) also demonstrated that the cash-for-care is more common among low-income families. Stefansen and Farstad's studies (2008, 2010) also confirm that the differences in parental attitudes regarding the kind of care that best serves the interests of their children correlate with social class.

There are no studies yet comparing the take-up rates across Swedish municipalities. The first comparable statistics will be collated by Statistics Sweden in autumn 2010, for a report to the Ministry of Social Affairs (cf. data from Statistics Sweden, February 2010).²⁰ In 2008, 35 municipalities, including Stockholm, had adopted the programme, and by 1 January 2009, the number had risen to 79 (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, *ibid.*). As of 1 July 2009, it is a legal requirement for municipalities to provide information on utilisation rates to Statistics Sweden every six months (Municipal cash-for-care act, No. 2008:307).

In Iceland, 12 out of 77 municipalities had adopted a cash-for-care programme in December 2009, but no comparative use statistics are available (Rannsóknastofnun í barna og fjölskylduvernd 2010). However, the two biggest councils in the country are among the 12 that have adopted such a system, and thus, the majority of Icelandic families with children have the option to apply for the cash-for-care.

In Denmark, very few parents have so far received a cash-for-care. According to Rantalaiho (2009), a benefit was paid for 700 children in 2006. She notes that the main explanation for the low uptake is the strong position of day-care, and that parents think that attendance at a day-care cen-

²⁰ In 2011, Statistics Sweden has reported that for the first half of 2010, 1.1% of all children under the age of two were cared for by parents receiving cash-for-care.

tre is essential for the child's wellbeing and development (Kremer & Rantalaiho 2009, see also Borchorst 2006). The limitations of the Danish system must also be taken into consideration, as fewer parents qualify in Denmark, compared with the more inclusive systems in, for example, Finland and Norway. Another explanation could be that Danish municipalities do not provide sufficient information about the cash-for-care option.

Despite the lack of comparative statistics in the Nordic countries, it can be generally ascertained that Finland occupies a special position due to its relatively low take-up rates of day-care and the widespread use of the cash-for-care scheme. Norwegian data on take up rates for cash-for-care shows a downward trend year after year, and more and at the same time the provision of day-care services has increased. The picture in Sweden and Iceland is unknown due to the lack of statistics. In Denmark, relatively few parents have applied for the cash-for-care. The literature shows that mothers, particularly mothers with less education or an unstable labour market position, do take time off from work, and for a longer period than other mothers, which has to be seen as a challenge for the Nordic policy goals regarding gender equality.

2.3 Conclusion: the relevance of childcare policies for the Nordic welfare model

The objective of this chapter was to outline the similarities and differences in the Nordic countries' policies on Early Childhood Education and Care systems, over time and, where possible, to compare those policies with those of other EU countries in order to identify the specifically Nordic elements of childcare policy in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

The well-developed and comprehensive childcare policies found in the Nordic countries is often claimed to be a cornerstone of the Nordic countries' social-democratic welfare model (e.g. Gornick & Meyers 2003; Kangas & Rostgaard 2007). The purpose of childcare is to encourage women's labour market participation and to promote gender equality both in the family and at work. As the chapter has shown, all of the Nordic countries have, at a relatively early stage, developed a system of day-care for children to facilitate women's labour force participation. However, there is considerable variation between the countries in terms of ideology, policy

and practice, both in terms of the services offered and the focus on gender equality. At an early stage, the dual earner/carer model attracted broad political support, especially in Sweden and Denmark, and since the 1980s, these countries have offered day-care to a higher proportion of children than the other Nordic countries. Today, there is less of an obvious difference between Sweden and the other Nordic countries, while the provision of day-care in Denmark is still high, and starts in the child's first year. However, Iceland also has a relatively high proportion of small children under two in day-care. Compared with the EU-27 countries, which provide day-care for an average of 20% of children aged 0–2, the Nordic countries stand out at 45%, and by virtue of the fact that most of those children are in full-time care.

The use of day-care in the EU-27 for the age group of three years to school-starting age is higher (an average of 78% of this age group), although the Nordic figures for this age group are also generally high (80%). In Finland, however, only 46% of children in this age group are in day-care, partly because of the extensive use of cash-for-care, but also because of what seems to be support for a more familialistic model of care for children.

The Nordic countries also share the same attitude towards another objective of childcare policy, i.e. ensuring the child's wellbeing and meeting each individual child's needs. In the Nordic countries, the concept of "the good childhood" rests on the idea of the child being in the centre, which involves the child in the decision-making process and allows for free play – the latter despite the introduction of more formal and structured learning in day-care institutions. The expectation is that the quality of day-care will be high and the staff will be well trained, even though this is not always the case.

The proportion of the GDP invested in public-sector day-care for children aged 0–2 is also a particularly Nordic phenomenon. Compared with the EU-27 average, the Nordic countries spend much more as a percentage of GDP on childcare for this age group, while there is no difference in public spending on the older age group (from three years to school age). Public expenditure's share of total day-care funding does not differ significantly between the Nordic countries and the average for the 27 EU member states. The common perception – that public services in the Nordic countries are primarily funded by taxation – does not seem to hold true; Nordic parents contribute the same share of total funding as parents in the other EU countries. The Nordic countries have different ways of ensur-

ing that children from all income groups are able to enrol in day-care, including sibling discounts, reduced payments for low-income groups, students, etc. Parents in Denmark seem to pay the highest fees for day-care, both in direct, financial terms and as a percentage of average wages, while Swedish parents pay the least.

Unique to the Nordic countries is the right to day-care at the end of parental leave, which is the case in all of the Nordic countries except Iceland. This – in an international context – unique right underlines the Nordic countries' focus on the rights and wellbeing of the child by guaranteeing the child access to services that may be important for their further development. However, this right may depend on the parents' work status, as is the case in Denmark and Sweden, although children in Sweden are guaranteed a minimum of 15 hours of day-care per week.

Another political development – which explains the low uptake in Finland but which also seems to be significant in relation to the child's right to day-care – is cash-for-care programmes. All of the Nordic countries have now introduced such schemes, but the level of political attention and commitment varies from country to country. This becomes evident when one looks more closely at the debate about what serves the child's best interests and the child's right to spend time with their parents, but it is also part of a wider debate about justice, consumerism and limited resources in the public sector. The reasons for introducing the cash-for-care vary from ensuring equality between the families whose children are in day-care and those who are not, improving choice between services and financial benefits, and ensuring that municipalities have greater flexibility in the face of the newly established right to day-care. However, in Sweden and Norway, in an attempt to safeguard their best interests, children are able to attend day-care centres part time while their parents receive a benefit for part-time care.

In all of the countries, the amount of money paid out remains low, which is one reason why the cash-for-care comes under criticism, as it helps to maintain the traditional division of paid work and unpaid care, with women caring for the children and men earning money for the family. If amounts paid out in the Nordic countries are compared, they only correspond to about 10% of average earnings – except in Denmark, where the figure is 25%, but only for parents who do not receive other benefits or have low wages. The system is not necessarily parents' first choice – in Norway, mothers prefer longer maternity/parental leave and shorter

working hours. Nevertheless, the system seems to be popular, especially in Finland, where it has been a central aspect of childcare policy. The system is also particularly popular as an alternative to day-care among low-income families and families with a non-Nordic ethnic background.

Comparing the different dimensions of childcare policy, and the services and cash benefits available, several elements can be identified that continue to support the dual earner/carer model. These include the relative availability of day-care, the many younger children in day-care, the income-based fees for parents that allow low-income families to benefit from day-care, the emphasis on quality, and the respect for the child's wellbeing and development. On the other hand, there are differences between the countries in terms of the objectives of their childcare policies – differences that have existed since the late 1980s, but are exacerbated by current policy. Despite the common trend towards greater public-sector involvement in the funding and provision of day-care, the number of children in day-care varies greatly between the Nordic countries.

All of the countries offer a cash-for-care as an alternative to day-care, but the significance of the programme varies depending on the availability of day-care and on the national perception of what is best for the child. Over time, Danish, Swedish and Icelandic parents will perhaps look more favourably upon the cash-for-care and national programmes may have to be introduced. As has been seen in other countries, this may help to generate a wider range of care options for children from different income groups and ethnic backgrounds, but would run counter to more general principles of universalism and the idea of day-care as a socialising common denominator. It would also go counter to the Nordic countries' gender equality policy.

At present, the emphasis on facilitating labour market participation of both parents in Denmark, Iceland and Sweden, and especially Sweden, also the goal of ensuring gender equality, seems to favour a childcare model that is based on day-care services, which seems more in line with the original goal of the Nordic countries: to support and preserve the dual earner/dual carer model.

References

- Act amending the Day-care Institution Act [Right to a kindergarten placement], No. 73, 2008-08-08 [Lov om endringer i barnehageloven (rett til plass i barnehage) 2008-08-08 nr. 73].
- Act concerning cash benefits for parents with small children [the Cash Benefit Act] No 73/1997 [Lov om kontantstøtte til småbarnsforeldre nr. 73/1997-8.]
- Act on Childrens Day-care, 19 January 1973/36 [Lag om barndagvård 19.1.1973/36].
- Act on education and employment of teachers and administrators at pre-schools, primary schools and secondary schools No 87/2008 [Lög um menntun og ráðningu kennara og skólustjórnaenda við leikskóla, grunnskóla og framhaldsskóla nr. 87/2008.]
- Anttonen, A. & Sipilä, J. (1996). European Social Care Services: Is it possible to identify models? *Journal of European Social Policy* 6(2), 87–100.
- Bennett, J. (2008). *Early Childhood Services in the OECD Countries. Review of the Literature and Current Policy in the Early Childhood Field*. Florence: Unicef Innocenti Research Centre.
- Borchorst, A. (2002). Danish Child Care Policy: Continuity or Change? In: S. Michel & R. Mahon (eds.). *Child care policy at the Crossroads: Gender and welfare state restructuring* (pp. 267–288). New York: Routledge.
- Borchorst, A. (2006). The Public–Private Split Rearticulated: Abolishment of the Danish Daddy Leave. In: A. L. Ellingsæter & A. Leira (eds.), *Politicising Parenthood in Scandinavia: Gender Relations in Welfare States* (pp. 101–120). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Broddadóttir, I., Eydal, G.B., Hrafnadóttir, S. & Sigurðardóttir, H.S. (1997). The Development of Local Authority Social Services in Iceland. In: Sipilä, J. (ed.). *Social Care Services: The Key to the Scandinavian Welfare Model*, (pp. 51–76). Aldershot: Avebury
- Broström, S. (2006). Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education: Challenging Taken-for-Granted Ideas. In: J. Einarsdóttir & J. T. Wagner. (eds.) *Nordic childhoods and early education: Philosophy, Research, Policy and Practice in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden*, (pp. 223–256). Connecticut: Information Age Publishing.
- Bureau 2000. (2008). *Prisen på Pasning 2007*. Downloaded 15 March 2010 from: http://www.bureau2000.dk/fileadmin/users/bureau2000/Prisen-paa-pasning-2007_1_.pdf
- Child Care Allowance Act No. 1994:553 [Lag om vörðunarskið nr. 1994:553].
- City of Reykjavik* [Reykjavíkurborg]. (2008). Reglur um þjónustutryggingu. Downloaded 20 May 2010 from http://reykjavikurborg.is/Portaldata/1/Resources/leikskolasvid/reglur_um_thjonustutryggingu_-_2.pdf
- City of Reykjavik* [Reykjavíkurborg]. (n.d.) Þjónustutrygging – ný leið fyrir foreldra. Downloaded 20 May 2010 from http://www.reykjavik.is/deskto/pdefault.aspx/tabid-757/521_read-12136
- City of Copenhagen*. [Københavns kommune], (n.d.). Kriterier Hvem kan modtage tilskuddet? Downloaded 21 February 2010 from <http://www.kk.dk/Borger/PasningOgSkolegang/Boernepasning/PrivatePasningstilbud/PasningAfEgneBoern/Kriterier.aspx>
- Day-care Institution Act no. 64/2005 [Lov om barnehager nr. 64/ 2005.].

- Danmarks statistik (2010). Statistik banken, <http://www.statistikbanken.dk/statbank5a/default.asp?w=1280>, downloaded June 2010.
- Einarsdóttir (2005). We can decide what to play! Children's perception of quality in an Icelandic playschool. *Early Education and Development*, 16, pp. 469–488.
- Einarsdóttir, J. (2006). Between Two Traditions: Education and care in Icelandic pre-schools. In: J. Einarsdóttir & J. T. Wagner (eds.), *Nordic Childhoods and Early Education: Philosophy, research, policy and practice in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden*, (pp. 159–182). Connecticut: Information Age Publishing.
- Einarsdóttir, J. & Wagner J.T. (2006). Nordic Ideals as Reflected in Nordic Childhoods and Early Education. In: Einarsdóttir, J. & Wagner, J.T. (eds.). *Nordic Childhoods and Early Education: Philosophy, research, policy and practice in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden* (pp. 1–11). Connecticut: Information Age Publishing.
- Ellingsæter, A.L. & Gulbrandsen, L. (2005). Den lange veien- Barnhage som reel valmulighet. In: B. Brandth, B. Bungum & E. Kvande (eds.) *Valgfrihetens tid. Omsorgspolitik for barn møter det fleksible arbeidslivet*, (pp. 159–180). Oslo: Gyldendal.
- Ellingsæter, A.L. (2006). The Norwegian Child-care Regime and its Paradoxes. In: A.L. Ellingsæter & A. Leira (eds.) *Politicising parenthood in Scandinavia: Gender relations in welfare states* (pp. 1–26). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Ellingsæter, A.L. & Leira, A. (2006). Introduction. In: A.L. Ellingsæter & A. Leira (eds.). *Politicising parenthood in Scandinavia: Gender relations in welfare states* (pp. 1–26). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Ellingsæter, A.L., & Gulbrandsen, L. (2007). Closing the Childcare Gap: The Interaction of Childcare Provision and Mothers' Agency in Norway. *Journal of Social Policy*, 36, 649–669.
- Eydal, G.B. (2008). Policies promoting care from both parents: The case of Iceland. In: G.B. Eydal & I.V. Gíslason (eds.). *Equal rights to earn and care* (pp. 111–148). Reykjavík: Félagsvísindastofnun.
- Esping-Andersen, G. (1999). *Social Foundations of Post Industrial Economies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Esping-Andersen, G. (2009). *The Incomplete Revolution*. Malden: Polity Press.
- Finch, N. (2006). Childcare and parental leave. In: J. Bradshaw & A. Hatland (eds.). *Social policy, employment and family change in comparative perspective* (pp. 119–142). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Gornick, J. & Meyers, M. K. (2003). *Families that Work: Policies for Reconciling Parenthood and Employment*. New York: Russel Sage Foundation.
- Haataja, A. (2010). *Vanhempainrahaa saaneet äidit. Kela, Nettityöpapereita 9/2010*. Helsinki: KELA.
- Hakkarainen, P. (2006). Learning and Development in Play. In: Einarsdóttir, J. & Wagner, J. (eds.). *Nordic childhoods and early education: philosophy, research, policy and practice in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden* (pp. 183–222). Connecticut: Information Age Publishing.
- Hanssen, J.-I. & Elvehøj O-M. (1997). Appendix. A statistical summary of the development of social services for children, elderly and disabled in the Scandinavian countries. In: J. Sipilä (ed.), *Social Care Services – The Key to the Scandinavian Welfare Model*, (pp. 178–198). Aldershot: Avebury.

- Hantrais, L. (2004). *Family Policy Matters – Responding to Family Change in Europe*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Hellevik, T. & Koren, C. (2000). *Parents Between Work and Care. Effects of the New Cash Benefit Scheme*. Oslo: NOVA.
- Helsingin Sanomat*. (2007). Day-care places all taken up in Helsinki – city looking for more premises in many districts, in *Helsingin Sanomat*, International edition. Downloaded 10 June 2010. from <http://www.hs.fi/english/article/Day+care+places+all+taken+up+in+Helsinki+-+city+looking+for+more+premises+in+many+districts+/1135236558011>.
- Hiilamo, H. & Kangas, O. (2006). *Trap for women of freedom to choose? Political frames in the making of child home care allowance in Finland and Sweden A:15/2006*. Turku: University of Turku.
- Johansson, J.E. (2006). Will there be any pre-school teachers in the future? A Comment on Recent Teacher Education Reforms in Sweden. In: J. Einarsdóttir, J. & J.T. Wagner (eds.), *Nordic childhoods and early education: philosophy, research, policy, and practice in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden*, (pp. 43–70). Greenwich: Information Age Publishing.
- Kammerman, S. (2000). Early Childhood Education and Care: An Overview of Developments in the OECD Countries. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 33, 7–29.
- Kammerman, S. (2003). *Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Selected OECD Countries*. Downloaded 15 March 2010 from <http://www.cesifo-group.de/pls/guestci/download/CESifo%20DICE%20Report%202003/CESifo%20DICE%20Report%204/2003/dicereport4-03-forum-4.pdf>
- Kangas, O. and Rostgaard, T. (2007). Preferences or institutions? Work–family life opportunities in seven European countries. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 17,3, 240–256.
- Kela*. (n.d.). Families. Downloaded 2 May 2008 from <http://www.kela.fi/in/internet/english.nsf/NET/081101123937EH?OpenDocument>
- Kela*. (n.d., a). Child Home Care Allowance. Downloaded 21 February 2009 from <http://www.kela.fi/in/internet/english.nsf/NET/150502155459EH?OpenDocument>
- Kela*. (n.d., b). Private Day-care Allowance. Downloaded 21 February 2009 from <http://www.kela.fi/in/internet/english.nsf/NET/150502155913EH?OpenDocument>
- Kela*. (n.d., c). Part-time child care leave. Downloaded 21 February 2009 from <http://www.kela.fi/in/internet/english.nsf/NET/150502161053EH?OpenDocument>
- Kela*. (n.d., d). Statistics on number of recipients of Home Care allowances. Downloaded 15 December 2009 from [http://www.kela.fi/it/kelasto/kelasto.nsf/alias/Pocket_09/\\$File/Pocket_09.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.kela.fi/it/kelasto/kelasto.nsf/alias/Pocket_09/$File/Pocket_09.pdf?OpenElement)
- Kremer, M. (2006). The Politics of Ideals of Care: Danish and Flemish Child Care Policy Compared. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, 13, 261–285.
- Kryger, N. (2007). Firing a national canon pedagogy against the global challenge : questions of pedagogy in Denmark . In: N. Kryger & Ravn, B. (eds.) *Learning beyond cognition* (pp. 75–94). København: Danmarks Pædagogiske Universitets Forlag.
- Korsvold, T. (2008). *Barn og barndom i velferdsstatens småbarnspolitik. En sammenlignende studie av Norge, Sverige og Tyskland 1945–2000*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

- Kristjansson, B. (2006). The Making of Nordic Childhood. In: J. Einarsdottir & J. T. Wagner. (eds.) *Nordic Childhoods and Early Education: Philosophy, research, policy and practice in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden* (pp. 13–42). Connecticut: Information Age Publishing.
- Landshagir 2009*. (2009). Reykjavík: Statistics Iceland.
- Lauritzen, T. (2005). "Kontantstøtteelskare" og "kontantstøttehatere". In: B. Brandth, B. Bungum & E. Kvande (eds.), *Valgfrihetens tid. Omsorgspolitik for barn møter det fleksible arbeidslivet*, (pp. 111–123). Oslo: Gyldendal.
- Leira, A. (1992). *Welfare States and Working Mothers: the Scandinavian Experience*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Leira, A. (2002). *Working Parents and the Welfare State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leira, A. (2006). Parenthood change and policy reform in Scandinavia, 1970s–2000s. In: A.L. Ellingsæter & A. Leira (eds.), *Politicising parenthood in Scandinavia gender relations in welfare states*, (pp. 27–52). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Lohman, H., Rostgaard, T. & Spiess, C.K. (2009). *Towards a Framework for assisting family policy in the EU. OECD working papers series*. Paris: OECD.
- Meulders, D. & Gustafsson, S. (2002). *The Rationale of Motherhood Choices: Influence of Employment Conditions and of Public Policies*. Downloaded 10 March 2010 from <http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/finalreport/hpse-ct-2001-00096-final-report.pdf>
- Moss, P. (2007). Starting Strong: An Exercise in International Learning. *International Journal of Child Care and Education*, 1, 1, p. 11–21.
- Municipal child home-care allowance act No. 2008:307 [Lag om kommunalt vårdnadsbidrag nr. 2008:307].
- Ministry of Health and Social Affairs* [Socialdepartementet]. (2007). Vårdnadsbidrag. Familjepolitisk reform. Ds 2007:52. Stockholm: Socialdepartementet.
- Ministry of the Interior and Social Affairs* [Indenrigs- and Socialministeriet]. (2009). Vejledning om dagtilbud, fritidshjem og klubtilbud 2009. København: Indenrigs- og Socialministeriet.
- Nilsen, R.D. (2005). Friluftsliv i naturbarnehagen- et norsk eksempel. In: G. Halldén (ed.) *Naturen som symbol för den goda barndomen* (pp. 106–130). Stockholm: Carlsson bokforlag.
- NOSOSKO 2007–8* (2009). Social Protection in the Nordic Countries 2007–2008. Scope, expenditure and financing. Copenhagen: Nordic Social-Statistical Committee.
- Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration* [NAV]. (n.d.). Kontantstøtte. Oslo: NAV. Downloaded 12 August 2010 from: <http://www.nav.no/Familie/Kontantstøtte>.
- OECD*. (2001) Starting strong. Paris: OECD.
- OECD*. (2006). Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care. Paris: OECD.
- Petrie, P., Moss, P., Cameron, C., Candasa, M., McQuail, S. & Mooney, A. (2003). *Early Years and Childcare International Evidence Project*. Great Britain: Department for Education and Skills.
- Plantenga, J. & Remery, C. (2008). *The provision of childcare services. A comparative review of 30 European countries. The co-ordinators' synthesis report prepared for the*

Equality Unit, European Commission. Downloaded 20 March 2010 from <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=545&furtherNews=yes>
Platform for government by the Labour Party, Socialist Left Party and Centre Party 2005 [Platform for regeringssamarbeidet mellom Arbeiderpartiet, Socialistisk Venstreparti og Senterpartiet (2005)].

Proposal for the Municipal child-home care allowance act, Prop. 2007/08:91 [Förslag till lag om kommunalt vårdnadsbidrag, Prop. 2007/08:91].

Rannsóknastofnun um barna- og fjölskylduvernd. (2010). Umönnun ungra barna í Reykjavík. Hluti II: Rannsókn RBF fyrir Leikskólasvið Reykjavíkurborgar 2009–2010. Reykjavík: Rannsóknarstofnun um barna- og fjölskylduvernd.

Rantalaiho, M. (2009). *Kvoter, valgfrihet, fleksibilitet. Indre spenninger i den nordiske familiepolitikken*. København: NIKK.

Rauch, D. (2007). Is There Really a Scandinavian Social Service Model? *Acta Sociologica*, 50, 249–269.

Rauhala, P.-L., Andersson, M., Eydal, G. B., Ketola, O. & Warming, H. (1997). Why Are Social Care Services a Gender Issue? In: J. Sipilä (ed.) *Social Care Services the Key to the Scandinavian Model*, (pp. 131–155). Aldershot: Avebury.

Repo, K. (2010). Families, work and home care. Assessing the Finnish child home care allowance. *Barn*, 28,1:43–63.

Rostgaard, T. & Fridberg, T. (1998). *Caring for Children and Older People-A Comparison of European Policies and Practices Social Security in Europe 6*. Copenhagen: The Danish National Institute of Social Research.

Rostgaard, T. (2002). Setting Time Aside for the Father – Father’s Leave in *Scandinavia. Community, Work and Family*, 5, 343–364.

Rostgaard, T. (2004). *With due care: Social care for the young and the old across Europe. PhD-thesis*. Copenhagen: The Danish National Institute of Social Research.

Rønsen M. (2005). *Kontantstøttens langsiktige effekter på mødres og fedres arbeidstilbud. Rapporter 2005/23*. Oslo: Statistics Norway.

Salmi, M. (2006). Parental choice and the passion for equality in Finland. In: A.L. Ellingsæter & A. Leira & (eds.) *Politicising parenthood in Scandinavia gender relations in welfare states*, (pp. 145–170). Bristol: Policy Press.

Salmi, M. & Lammi-Taskula, J. & Närvi, J. (2009). *Perhevapaat ja työelämän tasa-arvo. Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriön julkaisuja, Työ ja yrittäjyys 24/2009*. Helsinki. TEM.

Schools Act no. 1100/1985. [Skollag, nr. 1100/1985].

Sipilä, J. (ed.). (1997). *Social Care Services: The Key to the Scandinavian Welfare Model*. Wiltshire: Avebury.

Sipilä, J., Repo, K. & Rissanen, T. (2010), *Cash-for-Childcare: The Consequences for Caring Mothers. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing*

Skrede, K. (2004). Familiepolitikken grense-ved “likestilling” light? In: Ellingsæter, A. L. & Leira, A. (eds.). *Velferdsstaten og familien. Utfordringer og dilemmaer*, (pp. 160–200). Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.

STAKES. (2007).

Statistics Denmark. (2009). Statistikbanken. Downloaded 14 March 2010 from www.statistikbanken.dk

- Statistics Norway*. (2010). Barn i barnehage -foreldrebakgrunn og utvikling de seneste årene. Oslo: Statistics Norway.
- Statistics Norway*. (2007). Barn i lavinntektsfamilier 1996–2004. Oslo: Statistics Norway.
- SCB, Statistics Sweden*. (2007).
- SCB, Statistics Sweden*. (2008).
- Statistical Yearbook* [Statistisk årbok]. (2009). Mottakere av kontantstøtte og antall barn med kontantstøtte. 31. Desember. Downloaded 19 May 2010 from <http://www.ssb.no/aarbok/tab/tab-143.html>.
- Stefansen, K. og Farstad, G. (2008). Småbarnsforeldres omsorgsprosjekter Betydningen av klasse. *Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning*, 49, 342–374.
- Stefansen, K. & Farstad, G.R. (2010). Classed parental practices in a modern welfare state: Caring for the under threes in Norway. *Critical Social Policy*, 30, 120–141.
- Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions* [Sveriges Komuner och Landsting]. (n.d.). Downloaded 12 November 2009 from <http://www.sk.se/artikel.asp?A=56315&C=7092>.
- Swedish National Agency for Education* [Skolverket]. (2005). Beskrivande data om förskoleverksamhet, skolbarnsomsorg, skola och vuxenutbildning 2005 Stockholm: Skolverket. Downloaded 15 May 2010 from <http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=1523>
- Swedish National Agency for Education* [Skolverket]. (2008). Ten years after the pre-school reform A national evaluation of the Swedish pre-school Report 318. Stockholm: Skolverket. Downloaded 15 May 2010 from [http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/193/url/0068007400740070003a002f002f007700770034002e0073006b006f006c007600650072006b00650074002e00730065003a0038003000380030002f00770074007000750062002f00770073002f0073006b006f006c0062006f006b002f0077007000750062006500780074002f0074007200790063006b00730061006b002f005200650063006f00720064003f006b003d0032003100330036/target/Record%3Fk%3D2136](http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/193/url/0068007400740070003a002f002f0077007700770034002e0073006b006f006c007600650072006b00650074002e00730065003a0038003000380030002f00770074007000750062002f00770073002f0073006b006f006c0062006f006b002f0077007000750062006500780074002f0074007200790063006b00730061006b002f005200650063006f00720064003f006b003d0032003100330036/target/Record%3Fk%3D2136)
- The Day-Care Facilities Act no. 501 06/06/2007]. [Dagtilbudsloven no. 501 06/06/2007].
- The law on Active Social Policy no. 709 AF 08/13/2003 [Aktivloven no. 709 of 13/08/2003].
- The Preschool Act No. 90/ 2008. [Lög um leikskóla nr. 90/2008].
- Wagner, T. (2006). An Outsider's Perspective: Childhood and Early Education in the Nordic Countries. In: J. Einarsdóttir & J. T. Wagner (eds.), *Nordic Childhoods and Early Education: Philosophy, research, policy and practice in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden* (pp. 1–13). Connecticut: Information Age Publishing.
- Wehener, C. & Abrahamson, P. (2005). State Recognition of New Family Forms? In: J. Bradshaw & A. Hatland (eds.). *Social Policy, Employment and Family Change in Comparative Perspective*, (pp. 61–78). Cheltenham: Edward Elga

3. Family policies and the best interest of children

Berit Brandth and Ingólfur V. Gíslason

This chapter deals with the question of how care policies may influence the wellbeing of children. The aim is to give an overview of the state of Nordic research regarding this question. The chapter begins with a general discussion of the status and position of children in the Nordic countries, and a brief discussion of different viewpoints on their wellbeing. Next, the significance of parental leave for the welfare of children is addressed, focusing on their health as well as cognitive and social development. In particular, we will analyse the role of fathers for children, since a key aspect of Nordic social policy has been the promotion of fathers' greater involvement in childcare. This section is followed by a survey of issues, such as the significance of kindergartens for children, optimal starting age, how long children can (or should) attend daily, and what kind of impact kindergartens may have on children.

The best interests of children is high on the political agenda in the Nordic countries. The question of what is beneficial for children has become particularly pertinent because of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, according to which

“In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration.”

Considering children's interests is nothing new in itself, but the contemporary focus on the issue represents a significant extension of earlier times, when “the best of the child” was just one of many factors that had to be taken into account. As the quote indicates, we now must consider children's best interests in “all actions” and as a “primary consideration”. This translates into a mainstreaming of the child-perspective, which must now

be incorporated into all relevant political documents and evaluations. The UN Convention and the principle of the best interest of the child have spawned a great deal of debate about how they should be interpreted. One issue is whether the concept can be seen as universal, or in relative terms, in relation to different cultures and societies. Another topic of discussion is the judicial basis for making decisions and judgments concerning children and their best interests. Are we dealing with a judicial principle or a declaration of intent (Jalmert 2005)? In fact, the vague formulation of the UN Convention is intentional (Schiratzki 2003). In other words, a more specific formulation would have had little chance of being passed by the UN. Thus, it is up to each individual country to interpret the Convention and decide what is in the best interest of children, based on each country's cultural and social conditions. This is clearly apparent in, for example, the issue of children and corporal punishment, which all of the Nordic countries (as well as others) have banned, but which some other cultures see as being in the best interest of children (cf. Rosemond 2005).

Researchers have criticised the concept of "the best interest of the child" for being too open-ended and indeterminate (see Ellingsæter 2008). There is also disagreement among experts and researchers as to what actually is good for children. Developmental psychology focuses on the abstract child, while sociologists primarily see children's best interest in connection with concrete contexts, situations and relationships. Another issue to consider is that society changes over time. This is true for social ideologies, power relations and the prevailing understandings of gender, all of which influence how we view children's best interests. For example, the best interests of the child are seen within the framework of the family, reflected in Nordic family policies. However, the traditional views of the family are changing with the process of modernisation, illustrated, among other things, in Norwegian parents' positive views regarding kindergartens (Ellingsæter 2007). The development of kindergartens in Norway and the great demand for kindergartens suggest that parents today prefer kindergartens over other types of childcare (Ellingsæter & Gulbrandsen 2007). These examples show how our views of the best interest of the child change over time and that this affects the formulation and implementation of the systems of family policy.

The Nordic countries have a long tradition of focusing on the welfare of children. Göran Therborn (1993) has divided the development of children's rights into three variables: the replacement of the patriarchal fami-

ly model with the “rights of the child family”, equality between children born within and outside of marriage, and finally, the legitimation of children’s independence and personal integrity. “In terms of each of the three variables, the Nordic family of nations is on top, witnessing its status as the pioneer. The concentrated location of the Nordic countries in the top is the most visible family gathering of all” (Therborn 1993, 257). Therborn implies that the Nordic countries have benefited from the legal system not being affected by that much “early modern patriarchy” (ibid. 276).

For children, modernity and especially what Giddens calls late modernity have in many ways come to mean improved rights and greater opportunities. The United Nations made 1979 the Year of the Child, and, in 1989, adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Beyond that, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms established the principle of equality between children born within and outside of marriage (Therborn 1993). The Nordic countries ratified the convention comparatively early. Sweden was the earliest signatory (1990), followed by Denmark, Finland and Norway (1991) and finally Iceland in 1992. The countries have been on the frontlines in protecting children from various types of abuse, be it corporal punishment or sexual violence. A ban on the use of corporal punishment by parents was enacted in Norway in 1972, in Sweden in 1980, in Finland in 1983, in Denmark in 1985 (Therborn 1993, 265) and in Iceland in 2009, following a court case that gained widespread attention. All of the Nordic countries have also established public institutions that are charged with bringing children’s viewpoints into public debate and advocating on behalf of their interests in society. These are the offices of a so-called “barnombudsman”, though in Denmark it is called “Børnerådet”, or National Council for Children. Norway was the first to establish a children’s ombudsman as early as 1981. Sweden followed in 1993, Denmark in 1994, Iceland in 1995 and Finland in 2005. The Nordic ombudsmen for children have co-operated closely and convene formally once a year. Their tasks are similar in each country; the focus is on discussion and monitoring. The ombudsmen are all independent, public agencies without formal power to intervene in matters, or to amend decisions. Their tasks can be summarised into three points: 1. Initiate and promote discussion and debate about children’s situation and possibilities generally. 2. Ensure that children’s welfare is being taken into account in legislation and other public resolutions. 3. Provide children with their own, public voice. The only real difference in

the responsibilities of the national ombudsmen for children is that the Swedish agency is also tasked with monitoring the implementation and follow-up of the child convention and therefore has a greater monitoring and oversight role than the other national offices.

The development in the Nordic countries is characterised by the steadily increasing rights of children as individuals; they are moving away from the family and toward society. Society has given children opportunities (and obligations) to be educated, and has simultaneously prohibited families (and the market) from using children as sources of income in employment. Thus, the child is increasingly becoming an independent individual, with his and her own rights, and society has increased its possibilities to intervene when those rights are not respected. This development can be seen as part of the overall individualisation trend that characterises late modernity.

3.1 Children's wellbeing now and in the future

A report by the OECD, entitled "Doing better for children" (OECD 2009), notes that even though the concept of "the best interest of the child" appears simple, there is no simple or universally accepted way of measuring children's wellbeing. There are, however, two main ways of approaching it. The first one involves indicators and views the best interest of the child as a multidimensional concept that incorporates physical, social and mental aspects. The indicators are constructed from the central dimensions of life. In the second approach, the interest of children is expressed through subjective self-reporting. Children are simply asked directly to describe how they are doing. A shortcoming in this approach is that the responses of small children can be problematic.

Research also refers to the latter approach as the "children's perspective", and studies using this perspective have been called for to a greater degree. This perspective emphasises children's rights as individuals who require a good level of wellbeing in the here and now. Childhood is not merely preparation for adulthood, but an important part of life itself, and therefore children's own viewpoints should emerge more forcefully. Not surprisingly, when children themselves are asked directly about their wellbeing, they focus mostly on how they are in the *here and now* (Fattore

et al. 2008). The children's perspective thus sees the child as an active participant in the construction of his or her own life.

A commonly used perspective on children's wellbeing is "the long perspective" or "development perspective", which focuses on the accumulation of human capital and skills for the future. This perspective on children's wellbeing has been described as "well-becoming" by Jens Qvortrup (1985, 132). He used the concept when criticising the dominant position of the development perspective in research. In a well-becoming perspective, the focus is on the production of skilled and productive adults for tomorrow's society.

The differences between the two viewpoints, "well-being" and "well-becoming", are in some cases more seeming than actual, since what is positive from the perspective of children's wellbeing today is also important for their future wellbeing. The mistreatment of children, for example, not only damages them now, but also their future quality of life as adults. In other situations there are clear trade-offs: a child may choose an activity that looks good in the here and now, for example playing with friends (as supported by the child perspective) over doing homework, which promotes future outlook and would be encouraged by the development perspective. The interplay between the two perspectives can also be important. Fattore et al. (2009), studying children's wellbeing from the child's perspective, found that children's own viewpoints on wellbeing contain both current and future dimensions. Children place a great deal of importance on relationships, and these are a part of processes of interaction with family, friends, institutions and their environment. These processes are neither anchored in the current moment or the future, but weave together both of them through continuous experiences.

Judging from the tension between the two perspectives, also called "citizen child" vs. "future citizen", it seems that identifying what is in children's best interest is much more complicated than identifying it for other age groups (Frønes 2007).

The indicators most commonly used in research place a strong emphasis on future wellbeing. A focus on the future seems sensible when it comes to knowledge about children, considering that children have a longer future ahead of them than any other, older age group. However, children cannot be valued solely through the future that they embody, and their wellbeing here and now must not be neglected. In itself, childhood is an important time of life. Taking the UN's age definition of a child as any-

one under the age of 18, childhood can comprise approximately one-quarter of one's lifetime (OECD 2006: Starting Strong).

3.2 The significance of the first years of life for a child's development

All of human existence is based on the fact that we are social individuals. The development of the foetus is clearly a process of preparation to communicate with other people. Communication begins already before birth, and a newborn baby quickly starts communicating with parents (and others) (Panskepp 2007; Trevarthen & Reddy 2007). Studies with infants (about 18 months) have shown that they understand when someone is in trouble, and they are ready to help regardless of whether or not it is to their own advantage (Tomasello 2009), indicating that children instinctively feel empathy. By that stage, children already have the ability to emulate others, and to understand and relate themselves to them. Relationships, however, can be either shallow or deep. The significance of deep, intimate relationships is the subject of lively discussion among researchers, and there appears to be no consensus as to how many such relationships are required for a positive development outcome, or how many relationships of this type a child is able to cope with.

Developmental psychology is perhaps where this is discussed the most. It borrows a lot from the theories of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth concerning children's development and attachments (Ainsworth & Bowlby 1965; Bowlby 1969). To summarise briefly, advocates of the attachment theory state that it is of primary importance for the optimal development of a child that they form a deep attachment to an adult caregiver. It is clear that both Ainsworth and Bowlby initially had only one such person in mind – the mother. But later research and theoretical developments within this school of thought have tended to distance themselves from this scenario, to ideas that a child can form a deep, intimate bond with a caregiver with no regard to gender or biological relationship. In addition, a child can form such an attachment to several people, although there appears to be a maximum limit.

Recent decades of research clearly show that children are quite flexible in adapting to their environment. It is also relatively clear that a child's first two years, the baby years, are critically important for their future

lives (UNICEF 2008). The development and changes that take place during this stage are greater and more dramatic than at any other time in life. In the course of these two years, the brain is in a state of rapid development, and these years create the foundation for abilities that the child will draw on later in life. Here, social skills are especially important, and they develop mainly in interaction with other people. There is or there can be a very complicated interplay between the child and his or her environment. Traumatic events during this period tend to have a greater impact on future life than similar events that occur at other stages of life. For our discussion here, it is crucial to recognise that the factors that subject children to greater risks and the factors that promote children's nurturing are unevenly distributed among the population. "The greatest risk vs. protective factors are divided to the disadvantage of the most socio-economically vulnerable groups and their children" (Hwang & Wickberg 2001, 8).

Neuroscience has advanced rapidly in demonstrating the importance of the first months and years of life for a child's development (UNICEF 2008). During this time, the basic nerve connections are made within the brain, so that whatever happens during this period has a significant impact on what happens for the rest of one's life. Not only does this apply to cognitive development, but also to social and emotional skills. For this, among other reasons, there are many research findings on the positive effects of having children – particularly at-risk children – start early in quality, public institutions such as kindergartens (High 2008; Nielsen & Christoffersen 2009). Slowly but surely, insight into the meaning of the interaction between the environment and the biological human being seems to be breaking down the barriers between different academic disciplines, and leading to the basic understanding that "[t]he brain is essentially a historical and social organ" (Fuchs 2002, 320).

In this connection, we ought to remember that modern neuroscience is in many ways in its early stages. It is therefore too early to obtain well-tested research findings about what is in the best interest of children. In their survey of research, Blakemore and Frith (2005, 35) state, "[d]eprivation is certainly bad for the brain; on the other hand, enrichment may not necessarily be good for the brain. There is no evidence that hothousing is beneficial to brain development."

One thing that seems clear, however, is that the brain's capacity to "repair" itself is greater than once thought. The brain has the ability to transfer certain functions from a damaged area to a different one. Once an injury has

occurred, it is therefore not entirely irreversible. Nevertheless, what is established in a child's first months and years is decisive for the future life of that individual. In the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) research programme, it has been shown, for example, that children who have been subjected to traumatic experiences have a greater risk of disturbances in neural development and are thus at greater risk of social, emotional and cognitive damage that can later manifest as risk-prone behaviour, illness, disability, social problems and early death (Felitti 2002).

Ongoing studies of children, who grew up in the infamous orphanages of Romania and were subsequently adopted to Great Britain, indicate that although the children were severely underdeveloped in many areas, they have been able to catch up in certain areas, including intelligence. It does appear, however, that they continue to have problems with attachment and cognitive development. All the same, a fifth of the children show normal functions (Rutter, Kreppner & O'Connor 2001).

To summarise, research suggests that children are able to communicate with others from a very early stage, that they are capable of forming relationships with more than one person, and that the first months of a child's life are important for his or her cognitive and emotional development. In addition, the brain has been shown to be relatively flexible and to have the capacity of repairing partially what has gone wrong. As stated so powerfully in a report by UNICEF, entitled "The childcare transition" (2008): because of the knowledge that we now have about the development of small children, we must place greater demands on the quality of childcare during the first three years of a child's life – in both home-based and institutional childcare.

3.3 Parental leave and the best interest of children

Through the years, many Nordic studies and reports have examined parental leave and the way that it is used. Most of this research, though, has focused on the impact of parental leave on gender equality, working life and families. It has often been conducted in the aftermath of family policy reforms that have either introduced or expanded parental leave and the father's quota. At the same time, the research has rarely focused on how the various aspects of parental leave affect children.

This may have to do with the stated intentions of the system of parental leave. Whenever those intentions are articulated, they relate to a number of objectives such as employee protection, fertility, nutrition/breastfeeding, economy, equality between parents (i.e. strengthening women's labour market position and men's caregiver responsibility), improved father/child contact, greater freedom of choice, etc. These objectives span from the societal (access to the workforce) to working life and families, down to the individual. That all good aims are also good for children is rarely expressed explicitly either in debates or in depicting political intentions; yet one has to believe that this is a basic assumption.

Over the last ten years, it is possible, however, to see a trend toward a clearer articulation of the rights of children in the context of parental leave. Perhaps this is because of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A Swedish report on parental leave (SOU 2007:73), for example, points to the necessity of emphasising the best interest of children when forming policies that concern them. Many have noted that the child's perspective has become more noticeable in the Swedish parental leave debate (Sundström & Duvander 2002, Bjørnberg 2002), something that is probably also true in the other Nordic countries. One of the results of this trend may be more research into the issue of parental leave from the perspective of children's wellbeing.

The fact that the eventual consequences of policies intended for the best interest of children have not been a central research focus until now may be partly connected to the notable challenges presented by research methodology. It is not easy to assess the impact of parental leave on children. First of all, at issue are very small children, and research would require either longitudinal data or control groups. It has also been pointed out, justifiably, that the parental leave system is a series of assembled and complex agreements whose objectives are often mutually contradictory (O'Brien 2009). Decision-making in families regarding how best to utilise parental leave has to take into account a whole range of considerations, not only connected to the child, but also to the parents' own careers, and to time and money.

Studies of the effects of parental leave on children should therefore be seen as part of a comprehensive system of public investments in children (Galtry 2002, O'Brien 2009, OECD 2009). This makes it troublesome to isolate separate parts of the care system, and to measure the effects of only some of its parts, parental leave, for example. The countries that have

generous leave systems often also have good public health services aimed at pregnant women and infants (see Hiilamo 2008). Therefore, the wellbeing of children must be evaluated in a number of dimensions (Pleck 2007). Any understanding of the best interest of children requires taking into consideration state, local, family as well as individual levels.

For the purposes of the present study, we found alarmingly little research that could tell us which aspects of the leave system are having the best impact on children's development and wellbeing. The studies that do exist have mostly measured the existence and duration of leave. In the review that follows, we will first focus on research concerning the long-term effects of parental leave, and after that, its significance for children's wellbeing in the here and now.

The consensus in the Nordic countries appears to be that parental leave is good for children during their first year of life. Since none of the Nordic countries is significantly questioning parental leave in the child's first year, one must assume that it is taken for granted that the possibility it offers for parents to stay at home and care for their child during the first year of life has a positive impact on children. In several studies originating in countries without developed systems of parental leave, such as the United States and United Kingdom, we find that the importance of parental leave for children's wellbeing is addressed as a question. Research has been especially preoccupied with three effects: health, cognitive development and social attachment/relationships. We will take a look at each of these in turn.

3.3.1 Health

Infant mortality is a global indicator of wellbeing, because it is a reflection of the general standard of living in a particular country. It has been customary to associate it with economic development ("wealthier is healthier") (Pritchett & Summers 1996). There are nevertheless many indications that after a certain economic level has been reached, further improvement in economic wellbeing does little to improve public health. In fact, the opposite can be true (Ferrarini & Nordström 2009). Since there is variation in infant mortality among western welfare states, it is reasonable to assume that this can be affected by social institutions. A number of studies in recent years have examined family policy, and the issue of whether it can help explain the variation in infant mortality. Ruhm (2000) and Tanaka (2005) studied

the connection between paid parental leave and infant mortality in a series of OECD countries, including most of the Nordic countries. Both studies showed a strong correlation between generous, paid parental leave and low infant mortality. The connection is also confirmed in a more recent study by the Swedish researchers Ferranrini and Norstöm (2009). The Nordic countries have the best system of parental leave and the lowest infant mortality. Giving parents time and economic opportunities to spend time with their newborn child appears to have a significant effect on the health of infants (ibid.). Several mechanisms contribute to this: paid parental leave provides a good opportunity to breastfeed, monitor the newborn and get hold of equipment that promotes the health and safety of the child. In the Nordic countries, parental leave is a universal right, and there are many indications that the expansion of this welfare benefit has a significant impact on statistically measured health outcomes.

Parents' labour market participation generally has an impact on their children's health and wellbeing. A comparative analysis of the five Nordic countries confirms this (Reinhardt Pedersen & Madsen 2002). Children in families where neither parent is employed are at increased risk of negative health developments. The researchers point out that this can be due to a clustering of risk factors that are connected to parents' health and disability, as well as social, economic and environmental factors.

In countries without a developed system of parental leave, parents are forced to return to working life sooner after a birth. A study from the U.S. found that a mother's early return to working life, i.e. within 12 weeks following childbirth, had a negative impact on the health of the child (Berger et al. 2005). However, no impact on the child's cognitive, social or emotional development was found. Some of the health impact of parental leave may be connected to the fact that it provides a good opportunity for breastfeeding during the first six months of the child's life (Roe et al. 1999), at a time when breastfeeding is strongly encouraged. All of the Nordic countries recommend full breastfeeding, i.e. that children are not given any other nourishment besides mother's milk for the first six months. Each country also recommends that children continue to be breast-fed beyond six months, along with eating other food. Breastfeeding is advised for children until the age of one year (Norway, Finland, Iceland), or "for as long as possible", as the advice goes in Sweden.

The authorities' policies on breastfeeding go back a long way, and were spurred by high infant mortality (Schiøtz 2003). Breastfeeding frequency

has fluctuated over the years, reaching a low in the 1960s, when the era of housewives reached its peak (Ellingsæter 2005), but today the proportion of mothers who are breastfeeding when the child is six months old is relatively high in all of the Nordic countries. In our context, what is interesting about the policies for breastfeeding is how they connect to parental leave policies. Breastfeeding as an argument for parental leave was expressed explicitly in the Norwegian debate of 2008, which ensued from a proposal to split parental leave into three parts in accordance with the Icelandic model (see Chapter 1). The argument brought forth in opposition to the three-pronged leave model had to do with breastfeeding, because fathers obtaining one third of the leave could mean that mothers would have to return to work after six months only (if they opted for full wages). The tripartite model was rejected by the government for this reason. In this case it meant setting children's wellbeing ahead of gender equality. Thus, the consequences of the breastfeeding policy restricted the length of parental leave for fathers (Ellingsæter 2011).

3.3.2 *Cognitive development*

One approach used to study the effects of parental leave on children's cognitive development has been to examine the impact of parents (mothers) returning to work, and the point at which this occurs in a child's life. Results have been fairly contradictory, stemming from the fact that the studies vary significantly in terms of aims and methods of analysis (Rasmussen 2009). The variation in results may also be connected to what are the alternatives to home-based care provided by mothers. Further, it must be taken into account that the daily separation between parents and children can have both positive and negative effects, depending on situation and context. If working life and contact with colleagues and other adults increases parents' satisfaction with life, the impact on the child, too, will be positive. But, the impact can be negative if the separation leads to weakened attachment between parents and children. Research suggests that it is beneficial for a child's development to be cared for by his or her parents for the first 20 weeks of life (cf. Rasmussen 2009).

There is little to go on, in terms of Nordic research findings, concerning the impact of parental leave on children's cognitive development. However, measuring the effects of leave system expansions has been the methodological approach used in studies conducted in Norway, Denmark and Sweden.

In 1977, Norwegian parental leave was extended from 12 to 18 weeks. At the same time, mothers were given the right to one year of unpaid leave. Comparisons of register data for children born before and after the reform show that mothers' extended use of leave had a host of positive effects on children in later life (Carneiro, Løken & Salvanes 2009). Researchers found positive outcomes on variables such as success in the labour market, IQ and length of education. The results were particularly significant for children of mothers who prior to the reform would take very short leave. The analysis, according to the authors, confirms the view of parental leave as a successful policy for children and families, in part because of its apparent equalising effect.

The Danish study took as its starting point the expansion of parental leave from 14 to 20 weeks in 1984, and its aim was to study the effects of the expansion on children's educational achievement (Rasmussen 2009). The analysis found no long-term impact on children's educational achievement (grade point average in secondary school) as a result of the expansion – either positive or negative. There may be several explanations for this. The author highlights Danish kindergartens, which have been successfully developed for small children and are of a high quality. They can offset the differences between parent-based care and kindergarten care. It is also possible that parents with children born before the leave expansion compensated by investing more in their children. A third explanation offered by the authors is that 14 weeks – the length of the earlier leave period – was sufficient and that the extra six weeks were too short a time to be able to translate into better school achievement (Rasmussen 2009, 99).

A Swedish study also evaluated the effects of leave expansion (Liu & Skans 2009). The subject was the expansion of the Swedish leave period from 12 to 15 months for children born after August 1988. This study also did not find any effect by the leave expansion on children's subsequent school performance. Children of mothers with a higher education were an exception, and in these cases, a long leave period did have a positive impact. A negative impact on child development applies particularly to dysfunctional families, where children benefit more from being in kindergarten or pre-school in terms of language skills and emotional development. Spending childhood at home in a mother's care is often seen as being in the best interest of the child, but it can also represent a risk for some children. This has to do with what parents do together with the child when at

home, and to what extent the child is being properly stimulated. This speaks to the necessity of considering social differences when studying the significance of parental leave and the best interest of children.

Whereas in Sweden and Denmark, for the cohorts included in the studies, the alternative to a longer leave period spent at home was a well-developed kindergarten system, this was not the case in Norway in the 1970s. The alternative for most children not in their mother's care used to be a private nanny or caregiver. This, too, can help explain the differences in results between the studies.

3.3.3 The development of social attachments and contact with parents

In the last section on the significance of parental leave, we will look at its meaning in terms of the parent-child bond. Determining what is adequate "bonding time" is a topical issue as far as the length of parental leave is concerned. The Nordic countries, however, offer leave lengths that give no cause for concern in this regard (Gregg & Waldfogel 2005).

The development of good bonding and attachment between parents and children has been a particular focus of research when studying father's quotas. Its aim has been to improve gender equality and the relationship between father and child. In all of the Nordic countries, the arguments in favour of parental leave for fathers are that children have the right to both parents and that father's leave gives children better access to and fosters closer ties to their father. On the other hand, father's leave use is relatively minor for the most part, and even though it is growing, the question is how much more leave time should they use, for it to affect the future father-child relationship. A Swedish study (Ekberg et al. 2005) looked at the effects of the one-month father quota on fathers' behaviour when it came to caring for a sick child later on, and found that fathers' use of the quota month had no impact on use of care leave later, to take care of a sick child (temporary parental allowance). But perhaps caring for a sick child is not a good way to measure fathers' engagement in the care of their children (Duvander & Jans 2009).

Few studies have analysed the importance of leave use by fathers in relation to their long-term bond with the child. An exception is a study by Duvander and Jans (2009) who studied the correlation between fathers' leave use and their relationship with their children following leave. They

found that the longer the leave that the fathers took, the fewer hours they worked when the child was older, compared with fathers who only went on a short leave. The correlation between length of fathers' parental leave and contact with the child applied also in cases where parents were divorced and the child lived with the mother. Fathers who took a longer parental leave saw their child more frequently compared with fathers who had not done so. Thus, it is not necessarily leave use per se that is important for the amount of time fathers spend with children or how much childcare responsibility they assume later on. According to Haas and Hwang (2008), it is the *length* of the leave that is important. In their study, fathers who took longer leaves were also most likely to express the greatest satisfaction with the contact they had with their children.

A Norwegian study on the effects of paternity leave confirms the long-term effects of parental leave for fathers (Rege & Solli 2010). The study utilises data on fathers' income development in the five years following the introduction of the father's quota in 1993, as an indicator of their involvement in childcare. Their analysis shows that fathers' income declined by 2.1 percent, which is consistent with their increased time involvement in childcare. This is also confirmed by time-use data, which shows that after being at home during the father's quota, fathers spend more time together with their children when the children are older.

These studies are important, as they show that paternity leave does have implications for children's wellbeing. This is also significant, when we connect the findings to research showing that the involvement of fathers is crucial for children's cognitive and social development (Lamb 1997). Parental leave is an investment in children's wellbeing, and the increase in fathers' use of it and the decline in their work time should be seen as signs of their growing engagement with their children.

What fathers want out of the time spent together with their children is one thing, practices can be something else entirely. A Norwegian study found differences in the character of father's care depending on whether the mother went back to work or not during his leave (Brandth & Kvande 2003). It did not, however, find a significant correlation between staying home alone during the father's quota and an actual reduction in work time after the leave (Brandth & Kvande 2004). Fathers who had stayed home alone with the child during their leaves did not prioritise shorter working hours any more than those who had used their leave with the mother at home simultaneously on a full- or part-time basis. What had an influence on a father's post-leave work-

ing hours was the mother's working hours. A mother's part-time employment made it more necessary for the father to work full time. This shows how the impact of parental leave on the father-child relationship may be influenced by circumstances beyond the actual leave.

The different results of correlation analyses can be very dependent on the measures that are used. Duvander and Jans (2009) point out that it is difficult to distinguish between selection and causal relation. There may be fathers who are highly engaged in their children's development even without taking parental leave. Fathers can also have different work-time strategies following leave that are not easily measured in statistics as reduced work time. For example, an interview study showed that fathers actively negotiated the boundaries between work and home following their leave. The changes they made included greater use of flexitime, transferring to a more family-friendly job, reduced weekend and evening work, and a decline in the significance of work in their lives (Brandth 2007).

Above, we have primarily focused on the effects of leave use on children's development and wellbeing over time. In the case of the latter indicator, contact between parents and child, future and present wellbeing overlap one another. Very little research has explicitly focused on the meaning of parental leave for children's wellbeing from the children's perspective. Here, we have to rely on parents to inform us and derive from that what appears to be in the best interest of children.

Brandth and Kvande (2001, 2002, 2003, 2005) have researched the connection between the Norwegian family policy system and (flexible) working life. They have studied the types of frameworks that various work contexts place on the use of different family policy elements, such as the father's quota. The focus has been on fathers and their possibilities of staying at home with children, and not directly on the consequences for children's wellbeing. Also worth noting is the importance of working life in how families organise childcare, as this research suggests. It has been shown, among other things, that flexible/choice-based leave systems subject parents to increased risk for pressure from their employers, compared with a non-transferable, individual leave system that tends to be viewed as part of workers' rights issued by the state. If leave has to be negotiated between employees and employers, it is easier for work to "eat into" leave time, which may have consequences for the child's possibilities of spending time with parents.

On the other hand, it is assumed that a flexible leave system benefits children's wellbeing, because it gives employed parents tailored options for spending more time with their children. A flexible leave that can be taken over the course of many years may help to ease the situation between work and care responsibilities. In that sense, it can be seen as contributing to children's wellbeing in that it alleviates parental stress and shortage of time to some extent. Ideas about a "happy childhood" place demands on a gendered use of family policies, but these ideas are incorporated into the use of available flexibility in work situations (cf. Johansen, 2007).

In order to evaluate the significance of parental leave for children's wellbeing, it is important to know what parents do when at home on leave. What is the quality of the care they provide? How are the children being stimulated, and so on? Research on this topic is sorely lacking, but there is reason to expect significant social and cultural variation. Another question is what quality of life in the child's first year of life actually mean. It may include many elements, such as regular feeding, holding, consoling, changing diapers, bathing, dressing, sleep, stimulation and social interaction and closeness. The kind of care that parents provide, and their level of sensitivity, stability and awareness all contribute to how the child's social skills evolve. It has emerged, for instance, that fathers who have longer leave time at home with their children, while the mother returns to a full-time job, develop a rationale of care that affects the child's wellbeing in the here and now (Brandth & Kvande 2003). Parental leave entails an emotional as well as an economic and time investment into a child's wellbeing.

3.4 Fathers

The section above dealt with studies reporting how fathers' leave may have influenced the father-child relationship. In this section, we will examine fathers from a slightly broader perspective, since men and their opportunities as fathers are important aspects of Nordic efforts on behalf of gender equality in recent decades. This is clearly manifested in three areas. First, a substantial part of the first Nordic gender equality programme for men addressed the role of men as fathers. Five of the fifteen projects outlined were directly about this, while at least three other projects included it as a secondary theme (Men and Gender Equality, 1998). Second, all of the Nordic countries have changed their legislation in this area to

ensure greater participation by fathers. Perhaps most unambiguously this comes up in connection to parental leave, but it is also reflected in legislative changes that have made it easier for parents to divide the responsibility of caring for their children even after divorce. (Both topics are discussed in this book, in Chapters 2 and 3.) Third, several of the Nordic countries have carried out campaigns to encourage fathers to participate in childcare more or encouraged mothers to allow fathers to play a greater role. The intention has been especially to foster gender equality, but it is also important to take a closer look at research that addresses the meaning of fathers for children. In other words, we want to know what effects fathers' participation in the intimate, nurturing care of children has on their emotional, cognitive and social development.

First of all, we can state that when a man enters into an intimate relationship and becomes a father, he undergoes a series of physiological changes. Studies of hormonal changes in men have shown that being in a steady relationship diminishes testosterone levels (Booth & Dabbs, 1993; Mazur & Michalek 1998; Gray et al. 2004). During the period of pregnancy and after becoming a father, both testosterone and cortisol levels decline, while the level of estradiol increases (Berg & Wynne-Edwards, 2001; Gray, Kahlenberg, Barrett, Lipson & Ellison, 2002; Gray, Yang & Pope, 2006). Prolactin also elevates when fathers are in close contact with their children and responsible for their care (Fleming et al. 2001). To a certain extent, one could thus claim that the social role of fatherhood "feminises" a man. This is yet another indicator that the social role of spouse and father (-to-be) is accompanied by changes in the brain and in body's way of functioning and dealing with problems. It has also been found that men who are expecting children have a tendency, for example, to exhibit similar mood swings as pregnant women, and that they may gain weight (the so-called *Couvade syndrome*) (Klein 1991). "Engrossment" too seems to be a relatively well-established fact (Greenberg & Morris 1974), as well as the phenomenon in which new fathers can suffer from pregnancy-related depression (Paulson, Dauber & Leiferman, 2006). All of this is to say that we can see the interplay between the social and biological worlds, shutting out over-simplified ideas about one being caused by the other. What takes place is a delicate interchange and a complicated weave of social and biological factors that together prepare the man for his new role as father.

A question that remains unanswered is how this preparation affects a father's ability to occupy this role – is a father just as good a parent as a

mother? This is a difficult question, particularly because we have very little research into this area. Carrying out experiments is challenging, and in this area, mothers are generally much more active than fathers, so that any kind of comparison becomes problematic. Some knowledge, however, is available.

A number of international studies have shown that a father's early contact and everyday engagement with his child have a series of positive consequences for the child (Russel & Hwang 2004, Haas & Hwang 1999). A survey of current knowledge conducted by Sarkadi et al (2008) concluded, for example, that when fathers become engaged early on, this has a tendency to lead to continued involvement and engagement. It has emerged that fathers' early involvement also has a positive effect on children's eventual school performance as well as their social, behavioural and psychological wellbeing. The authors point to some methodological problems in the studies used, but consider the results sufficiently solid to be able to advise those who work with children and families to include special elements for encouraging fathers' participation in childcare. It is interesting to note that none of the studies in this survey exploits Nordic materials. This is in fact a major disappointment, considering the investments made in the Nordic countries to increase fathers' participation. The reason may be that the Nordic efforts have been primarily based on ideas of gender equality and only secondarily on the concept of the best interest of the child, even though the significance of the father/child relationship has been one of the strong arguments for the quotas used in parental leave. Thus, it appears to be time to call for more research on the impact of fathers on the cognitive, social and emotional development of Nordic children.

A relatively large swath of international research has shown that a father's absence has a negative social and emotional impact on the child. The accurate causal relationship is controversial. In many countries, being a single parent is associated with economic problems. In the Nordic countries, too, single mothers as a group are at risk for poverty. It seems obvious that this can have negative and emotional consequences, so that it is not the absence of a father that is damaging but the absence of the economic resources that can accompany fathers. Also, prior to actual divorce, there is often a lot of conflict between parents, which can have a negative influence on a child's emotional life, and these conflicts may continue even after the divorce has taken place. A child may see the parents' divorce and

one parent's absence as a betrayal. Other factors, such as the bullying of children living without a father, may also take place (Cabrera et al. 2000).

Other socioeconomic factors may also contribute to a situation in which a father's presence in a child's life can bring about negative effects. An example of this is if a father is forced to take on childcare as a result of losing his job (Russell 1982). These findings cannot, however, be applied directly to the Nordic countries, for example because their unemployment insurance is different (and better) than in the other countries. The financial stress suffered by a family, in the event that a father loses his job, may not be as significant a factor in the Nordic countries as it is in the United States. Other studies, again, suggest that it is not a given that fathers have a positive effect on children. Fathers who exhibit antisocial behaviour may have a negative impact on their children (Jaffee et al. 2003), which is hardly surprising.

In general, it seems that when given a chance, fathers manage childcare just as well as mothers. Children who, for different reasons, have grown up with only a father as caregiver are not any worse off than children who grow up in only a mother's care (Christoffersen, 1996; Jalmert & Olsson, 1997). It may be useful to conclude with the words of one of the world's most prominent researchers on the interaction between children and fathers: "With the exception of lactation, there is no evidence that women are biologically predisposed to be better parents than men are. Social conventions, not biological imperatives, underlie the traditional division of parental responsibilities" (Lamb 1997, 120).

3.5 Kindergartens and the best interest of children

Compared to parental leave, kindergartens are built on a much more clear-cut and explicit objective of serving the best interests of children. Here, the difference between a child's wellbeing in the here and now versus their development over the long term (especially school achievement) is relevant to research. As with research on parental leave, studies about the significance of kindergartens for children have mostly focused on development over the long term. The children's perspective has been largely missing. Historically, the goal of kindergartens has been different in each Nordic country. In Sweden and Denmark, kindergartens came to be seen as a way to increase women's employment and improve gender equality. In Norway,

kindergartens have had primarily a pedagogical legitimacy, and a service for children with special needs (Ellingsæter & Gulbrandsen 2003, 2005, 2007). Only in recent years have kindergartens become a service that is designed for all Norwegian children from the age of one onward.

Even though few people nowadays see kindergartens in a negative light, the discussion of what kindergartens mean for children keeps flaring up. The debates revolve chiefly around two issues. The first one concerns the age at which children should begin kindergarten, and the second concerns the appropriate length of kindergarten days. The UNICEF report entitled "The child care transition" (2008) describes research that shows that, "overall, there is a broad consensus that child care that is too early and for too long can be damaging" (ibid. 12). The report makes reference to both Norway and Sweden, noting that few children under the age of one attend kindergarten in those countries, owing to a well-functioning system of paid parental leave.

Very few studies distinguish between 1–2-year-olds (toddlers) and 3–6-year-olds. This is in spite of the fact that the most controversial and talked-about kindergartens are those for the youngest of children. One study that does make the distinction is a Swedish review of literature by the Swedish National Institute of Public Health (2009), which asked, which is best for toddlers, kindergartens or home-based care? This systematic review of research literature was initiated as a result of Sweden's introduction of a homecare allowance (*vårdbidrag*) in 2008, intended to enable parents of children aged between 12 and 36 months to stay at home with them after their parental leave period had run out. The goal was the same when the Norwegian cash-for-care policy was instituted in 1998. The Swedish literature survey only includes studies that distinguish between home care and kindergarten/other type of care. It also includes international studies, when the quality of the kindergartens is comparable to those in Sweden. The two measures used to evaluate the children's wellbeing were cognitive and socio-emotional development.

Few studies fulfilled the quality requirements for inclusion in the survey, because in methodological terms, this is a demanding field (Aukrust & Rydland 2009). Although the results are slightly inconsistent, the main conclusion is that kindergartens increase children's cognitive development compared with at-home care. When measuring three-year-olds, kindergartens had provided them with better cognitive and language skills. The study also found documentation that when measuring 8-year-

olds, both their language and mathematical abilities had developed better among children who had received kindergarten care. One of the reviewed studies, however, found no difference between children in kindergartens vs. at home.

Two other Swedish studies, not included in the review described above, examined the long-term effects of kindergartens compared to home-based care or other types of childcare. When the children turned eight, the researchers studied their cognitive, social and emotional development. They found that children who had been cared for in a kindergarten at an early age (before the age of one year) generally showed better developmental levels in the relevant areas, compared with children who started kindergarten later or were cared for at home. The conclusion was obtained by controlling for gender and family background (Andersson 1989). The children were re-evaluated at the age of thirteen. At that point, the positive effects of an early start continued to be discernible as the early starters did better in school and received more positive feedback from teachers on a number of social and emotional variables (Andersson 1992).

Several different explanations could be applied here. First of all, it is probable that kindergartens simply have a positive impact on children's development (Anderson 1992). Kindergartens staffed with pedagogically trained staff ought to stimulate children's development in all areas, and functioning in a group should also advance their social competence. Second, it is possible that parents who place their children in a kindergarten compensate for it by directing greater attention on the children when they are together (Andersson 1992), thus enhancing the positive effect. Third, we know from other studies that parents with interesting, stimulating jobs transfer this over to their children (Christoffersen 1996). In other words, when the parents are happy with their work, feel valued, and receive positive feedback in the workplace, it makes them better parents. When parents engage with other people outside the home, we can assume that they are stimulated in a way that is positive for the development of their children. There are also other possible explanations, but for the most part, these longitudinal studies show that kindergartens and early start do not influence children negatively; on the contrary, they can be both positive and stimulating and offer children a better start in life than exclusively home-based childcare.

The results are somewhat less certain when looking at emotional and social development, as opposed to cognitive development. The literature

survey conducted by the Swedish National Institute of Public Health found no definitive conclusions in terms of differences in the emotional and social development of small children who had been cared for at a kindergarten vs. at home. As pointed out in an article surveying family-friendly policies in the Nordic countries, care provided by parents can be important, but the most important aspect is the quality of the childcare, which can vary whether it takes place at home or in a kindergarten (Datta Gupta et al. 2008). In general, though, we can see that at-risk children and children of poor families benefit significantly from kindergartens (UNICEF 2008), and that kindergartens have a positive impact on gender equality, integration and school achievement. Childcare that helps to alleviate the effects of childhood poverty is important, and in this way, kindergartens contribute indirectly to children's development and wellbeing. It is also impossible to avoid the connection between cognitive development and emotional/social development, with the former positively affecting the latter. The study by the Swedish National Institute of Public Health points to the great need for high-quality research in this area.

Another aspect to consider in terms of the long-term effects of kindergartens is social mobility (Datta Gupta et al. 2008). Both Esping-Andersen (2004) and Waldfogel (2004) have pointed to the fact that publicly financed, high-quality kindergartens promote upward mobility among children of poor families. This is because in the Nordic countries kindergartens have been made available to all families, and place distribution has often favoured children from families with fewer resources. Providing high-quality kindergartens therefore appears to be an effective way to improve children's wellbeing. An important question in this connection is what actually constitutes good quality in a kindergarten.

This question is addressed in a Danish report on "The significance of kindergartens for children's development – A research review" ("Børnehavnens betydning for børns udvikling – En forskningsoversigt") (Nielsen & Christoffersen 2009). The aim was to assess what recent years of research have found regarding differences in the quality of kindergartens and how they can affect children's development. In this study as well, the primary focus is on the significance of kindergartens from the perspective of children's long-term wellbeing and development. The survey focuses on studies that provide information about children's cognitive, emotional and social development, i.e. the same indicators that were used in the survey by the

Swedish National Institute for Public Health. In addition, the survey utilises studies from OECD countries, including the Nordic countries.

The quality indicators highlighted by Nielsen and Christoffersen's (2009) report were number of children assigned to each adult, the education of personnel, types of activities, physical environment and parental involvement. Here, we will only go through the main conclusions and otherwise reference the report's comprehensive and detailed results and list of literature. First, the report shows that relatively few children per adult means that the employees have more time and energy to meet the needs of individual children. The younger the child, the fewer children should be assigned to each adult. This results in better care and more age-appropriate activities, and it also appears that children are better able to co-operate and show less aggression. Some research also shows that children experience stress when the personnel allocation is too low. Nielsen and Christoffersen point out that, based on existing research, it is difficult to pinpoint accurately the best ratio of children per adult. Such allocation must also be a continuous quality parameter; but it is clear that as long as the number of children is not too high, this creates more time, energy and peace, which again is good for children's long-term, positive development of their cognitive and social skills and health (p. 49).

The other quality indicator discussed by Nielsen and Christoffersen (2009) is the educational background of the staff. When employees have been trained not only in how to encourage children's development, but are also able to reflect on their own conduct in relation to the children, this has a positive and long-term impact on children's social, emotional and cognitive development. Higher educational levels and continuing education produce employees who act in a more stimulating and supportive manner. However, the report points out that employees' experience and their ability to create a good social atmosphere in kindergarten are also important. An evaluation of kindergarten services (ECEC services) in 25 OECD countries placed the Nordic countries on top, but showed that Norway has fallen short of its goals regarding the training of personnel. The same can be said of Finland and Denmark to a lesser degree, while Sweden and Iceland have met their goals to the fullest (UNICEF 2008, 2).

Positive contact between adults and children in kindergarten is frequently emphasised in the research literature reviewed by Nielsen and Christoffersen (2009). This type of contact is important for children's development and school preparedness, and is achieved through relevant

activities. The report takes up the issue of children's access to and use of school-relevant games and play, and refers to studies that have found dialogue between children and adults (for example on the basis of reading out loud) to be important in preparing children for school. The same is true of play that stimulates social skills through co-operation with other children of the same age. Kindergartens, as long as they are of a high quality, are an important arena for developing friendships with other children, but research is lacking on the correlation between children's relationships with their same-age cohorts and school achievement (Aukrust & Rydland 2009). Nielsen and Christoffersen (2009) note also that a high-quality kindergarten is one where children's motor and creative skills are stimulated. This is where a kindergarten's physical environment comes in, helping to shape children's development.

Last but perhaps not least, the authors underline the importance of good contacts between the kindergarten and a child's parents, for the sake of creating continuity and security, and making it possible to address any problems that may emerge. Compared to research on the significance of contact between parents and the school, there is little research on the importance of parental contact with the kindergarten. School research has shown that parents' interest in and contact with the school is associated with social class. It is therefore especially important for a child's development to involve parents in situations where language, social background or various cultural expectations may create difficulties. The impact of a kindergarten of inferior quality can be identified in particular in children who come from families with fewer resources (Magnuson et al. 2004).

3.6 How early should children start kindergarten?

As mentioned earlier, there is little reason for concern over the development of small children in Nordic kindergartens. One of the themes generating discussion, however, has been the debate over *when* children should begin kindergarten. The issue reflects parents' difficulties of returning to work after the parental leave period has run out, but it cannot be understood solely through the needs of the labour market and the parents' own situation. According to Gulløv (2003), the decision by parents to send a child to a kindergarten is a social practice with a symbolic meaning – connected to the moral and social understandings of childhood and parenthood. The

discussions about kindergartens as good places of care for the smallest children bring forth ambivalence and competing cultural conceptions of care, children and the role of the welfare state (Gulløvn 2003, 24).

One study that explicitly takes up the issue of age and the best time to start kindergarten is Ann-Zofie Duvander's (2006) report "When is the right time for kindergarten?" ("När är det dags för dagis?"). The report describes the age when kindergarten commonly begins for children in Sweden, and looks at parents' preferences. Swedish children usually start kindergarten at 1.5 years of age. One-fifth of children begin at the age of two or a little later. The starting age may have to do with practical considerations, such as the availability of a vacant place at a kindergarten, as well as parents' own preferences (p. 19). The kindergarten starting age of children of low-income families, where the mother earns substantially less than the father, is much later than that of other children. These parents also prefer their children to start later.

Thus, the report shows that parents' labour market engagement and socioeconomic status influence the timing of when their child starts kindergarten. This is corroborated by Norwegian studies that have found highly educated and better-off parents to be more likely than others to choose a kindergarten upon the end of their parental leave (Ellingsæter & Gulbrandsen 2003, 2007). Postponing the start of kindergarten is, on the other hand, especially important for many working-class families, who – as opposed to middle-class parents – think that children should first learn various basic skills, including to talk and walk, before they can benefit from what the kindergarten has to offer (Stefansen & Farstad 2008). Thus, according to Stefansen and Farstad (2008) working-class parents do what they can to be able to care for their child at home beyond the parental leave period. The most common solution is for the mother to adjust her work schedule. The middle-class parents in their study were more likely to view a one-year-old as an active, social individual who needed the challenges and stimulation provided by a kindergarten. The different types of understandings on which parents base their choice of care are thus connected to their conception of a kindergarten as an arena that can take care of what they view as the child's best interest. In other words, cultural conceptions of what is beneficial for children follow a class-based pattern (Farstad & Stefansen 2008).

The many choices that the Nordic welfare states offer enable parents to choose the best age for their child to begin kindergarten according to

their own views. That the concept of “children’s best interest” is not a given can be seen from the option of combining parental leave and part-time work (in Norway called “gradated leave”). A Norwegian study found that mothers who allowed their children to begin kindergarten early, on a part-time basis from the age of 6 months, argued that it was best for their child. They felt that the children were not happy with just being at home with their mother, since small children are also social individuals who like being in the company of other children and adults (Holter & Brandth 2006). It was interesting that mothers who delayed the start of kindergarten also argued that it was in their child’s best interest. Regardless, it has been noted that the discourse surrounding a childhood spent at home as being “the best for children” is being challenged by a new discourse about childhood that emphasises the “citizen child”, participating in several social arenas, having a need for multiple relationships. Parallel with this discourse there is another where especially mothers find it important to work part time so that the youngest children can spend shorter days at the kindergarten (Johansen 2009).

Duvander’s report shows that the age of starting kindergarten declined during the period studied (1993–1999), indicating a trend to commence earlier. Starting kindergarten early appears to have become more accepted over time. This may be related to how children are regarded in society today. Children are not seen merely as the centre of the family, but as individuals in their own right, with rights that differ from those of adults. Children need their parents, but it is also believed that children require contact with professional groups that can contribute to children’s development. In Norway, the Ombudsman for Children (Barneombudet) cautions against caring for children solely at home (with the cash-for-care benefit) up to the age of three; this particularly concerns the children of immigrants, with regard to their integration and language development. A number of studies have observed that the earlier at-risk children begin kindergarten, the better their development outcomes. Kavli (2001, 2002) has shown, for example, how the cash-for-care benefit, that supports home-based care over kindergarten, works against the goal of integrating immigrant children into Norwegian society.

As we have seen, the argument *for* an early start is that it benefits children’s development – something that is well documented in research. Arguments *against* an early start have been collected into a Swedish debate book (Kågeson 2005). One of the arguments is that small children are

not yet sufficiently mature to function in large groups or have relationships with multiple people outside the home, that they are too care demanding and susceptible to stress. Another of Kågeson's arguments that receives a certain amount of support from research is that 1–2-year-olds are at high risk for infectious diseases, and infections spread easily in kindergartens. Among other things, it has been proven that kindergarteners are at increased risk for asthma as a result of repeated respiratory infections (Nystad et al. 2001). Skadberg and Berstad (2001), on the other hand, have found that training kindergarten personnel in preventive measures leads to a significant reduction in infections in children under the age of two. Attending kindergarten has also been shown to have positive health effects, through diet and physical exercise, among other things (Holte 2008, Dankel 2008).

3.7 How long should a kindergarten day be?

As mentioned before, the quality of institutionalised childcare is critical in the same way that the quality of parental care is important. There are clear indications that the institutionalisation of childcare has had a positive impact on children's development. This seems to be true in both Scandinavia and the United States. But there are also indications that this is not the case unconditionally, in other words, it is possible that there is an upper limit to how long children's kindergarten days should be.

On the basis of a nation-wide child study in Denmark, three main conclusions emerged: "No developmental differences between children who have received care from their mothers and children who have been cared for by others. No determinable difference between children in care for, respectively, 0–30 hours, 30–35 hours or 35–45 hours per week. More than 45 hours of day-care per week (conversely results in) a significant and marked increase of both difficult temperament and behavioural problems." (Sommer 2003, 107). One must, however, take into consideration that the social background of these children also differed from those of other children in several ways, which may explain some of their problems. For example, there were more children from families that had undergone divorce and more children of single mothers (ibid. 108). Many studies indicate that the play of children in such circumstances is somewhat more conflict-prone, but the findings are not clear (Aukrust & Rydland 2009).

Sommer concludes: “An unusually high number of hours spent per week in institutional day-care cannot therefore – based on the Danish long-term study – alone explain the different temperament and behaviour of these children. But there is a connection, and it probably interacts with the particular situation of the children’s families. Spending an extreme number of hours in institutional day-care may, against this background, be described as a contributing risk factor” (Sommer 2003, 108).

In other words, long hours spent in kindergarten is not in and of themselves negative for children’s development. The negative effects of longer days may emerge in kindergartens that are of a lower quality and manifest in children who are already at risk.

Few studies have focused on the effects of long days in kindergartens for children’s wellbeing in the here and now. One exception is a qualitative study in which pre-school teachers were asked about their views regarding the length of time spent in kindergarten (Johansen 2009). Kindergartens have a central place in children’s everyday lives, since most children today are cared for in kindergartens and spend more and more time there. Pre-school teachers are part of a profession that has the skills and expertise concerning children’s learning and their best interests.

An important argument for shorter days (6 hours) in this study was that children might become fatigued by longer hours. The smallest children in particular were seen as too young to cope with an entire 8-hour day in kindergarten. The fatigue argument is not clear-cut, however. Some of those questioned thought that children being tired was not necessarily a problem, but rather a manifestation of the kindergarten managing to offer children meaningful activities and experiences. Another argument for shorter days addressed the quality of the kindergarten, in particular the relationships between children and adults. For economic reasons, municipalities are often forced to increase the number of children in kindergartens, without being able to hire more personnel. This results in more frequent disturbance, clamour and stress – an argument against longer days. The pre-school teachers felt that a smaller number of children per adult would bring up the quality of time spent in the kindergarten, which is entirely in line with the Danish study that was discussed above (Nielsen & Christoffersen 2009). The third type of argument in favour of shorter days was more normative and was connected to considering time spent with parents as the best alternative, particularly for the youngest children. Certain relationships were viewed as stronger and

more meaningful than others, in this case, the parent-child relationship. This was reflected in conceptions of a “good childhood”, i.e. a childhood spent at home and “characterised by peace, quiet and cosiness” (Johansen 2009, p. 108).

From Johansens (2009) study, another understanding of family emerged as well, of families that are suffering under time squeeze and parental stress. This is then transferred over to the children, making kindergartens a good place to be, compared with afternoons spent with the family. Longer days thus become a benefit, because the activities at a kindergarten take place on the children’s own terms. Pre-school teachers’ most important arguments in favour of full-length kindergarten days are, however, pedagogical in nature, and connected to the view that children need time to develop good relationships with the other children and the adults at the kindergarten. Shorter days as well as split staying time and part-time places weaken continuity and therefore impair children’s opportunities for relationship building through participation in game playing. Shorter days quickly conflict with the time-oriented organisation of the pedagogical programme, which is why the pre-school teachers were not in their favour.

In the Nordic countries, debates occasionally arise regarding whether we are going in the right direction when it comes to childcare. In Iceland, for example, a recent book provoked debate by criticising the developments taking place in this area from the perspective of attachment theory and psychoanalysis (Kjartansdóttir 2009). In broad terms, we can claim that the childcare debate has been relatively peaceful in recent years with regard to kindergartens, even though (or perhaps because) their expansion has been relatively quick.

3.8 Summary/conclusion

All of the Nordic countries are at the top of the list of countries that take care of children’s rights and wellbeing during their most vulnerable and formative years (UNICEF 2008). The Nordic countries share many commonalities in their care policies, which is why they are often viewed as if they were a single unit. But as we have seen, there are also significant differences between the systems of care in terms of both form and scope. Up to now, Nordic research has not been sufficiently comparative and has

therefore been unable to determine whether these differences have any meaning for children's wellbeing, or in what ways.

Most of the studies that have attempted to measure the effects of parental leave have concerned themselves with leave length. Some have concluded that it should be no less than six months (Gregg & Waldfogel 2005), a limit that the Nordic countries have met with margin to spare. Others recommend one year (UNICEF 2008). When the recommendation is made from the perspective of the best interests of children, the picture becomes more complicated (and the recommendation is to offer longer leaves), unlike when considering issues like gender equality or the labour market. From the perspective of children's wellbeing, existing research is unable to identify in detail the kind of length, flexibility, economic compensation, and proper distribution of leave time between parents to recommend.

What we have seen is that long and well-paid parental leave has a positive impact on children's wellbeing in terms of health, learning and parent-child contact. It depends, however, on the situation of the individual family and the quality of home care. Home-based childcare can also be associated with risk factors. It seems relatively clear that a father's participation in childcare has a positive effect on the child's development. This must be taken into consideration when forming care policies.

When it comes to kindergartens, we have not found scientific studies that show a negative effect on children's development in the Nordic countries. In general, we can say that research does not give cause for concern when it comes to children in *good* kindergartens. On the contrary, it seems clear that most children develop better in a greater number of areas when taking part in the activities provided by a high-quality kindergarten. Although a low-quality kindergarten can have a very negative effect, the same is true of all types of childcare.

Finally, we would like to point out that the need for consistent, comparative research on children's wellbeing is needed. In this, the Nordic countries should make it their goal to show a good example.

References

- Ainsworth, M. & Bowlby, J. (1965). *Child Care and the Growth of Love*. London: Penguin Books.
- Andersson, Bengt-Erik. (1989). Effects of Public Day-Care: A Longitudinal Study. *Child Development* 60, 857–866.
- Andersson, Bengt-Erik. (1992). Effects of Day-Care on Cognitive and Socioemotional Competence of Thirteen-Year-Old Swedish Schoolchildren. *Child Development*, 63, 20–36.
- Aukrust, V.G. & V. Rydland. (2009). Barnehagens kvalitet og skolefaglig læring: en kunnskapsoversikt. *Norsk pedagogisk tidsskrift*, 179–188.
- Ben-Arieh, A. & I. Frønes. (2007a). “Indicators of Children’s Well being: What should be Measured and Why?”, *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 84, pp. 249–250.
- Ben-Arieh, A. & I. Frønes. (2007b). “Indicators of Children’s Well Being – Concepts, Indices and Usage”, *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 80, pp. 1–4.
- Berg, S. & Wynne-Edwards, K. (2001). Changes in testosterone, cortisol, and estradiol levels in men becoming fathers. *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, 76, 582–592.
- Björnberg, U. (2002). Ideology and Choice between Work and Care: Swedish Family Policy for Working Parents. *Critical social policy*, 22, 33–52.
- Blakemore, Sarah-Jayne & Uta Frith. (2005). *The Learning Brain. Lessons for Education*. Malden. Blackwell.
- Booth, A. & Dabs, J. (1993). Testosterone and men’s marriages. *Social Forces*, 72, 463–477.
- Bowlby, J. (1969) *Attachment and Loss*, Vol 1: Attachment. New York: Basic Books.
- Bradshaw, J. (2006). Child benefit packages in 15 countries in 2004. In: Lewis, J. (ed.) *Children, Changing Families and Welfare States* Cheltenham, Edward Elgar.
- Bradshaw, J. & Mayhew, E. (2006). Family Benefit Packages. In: Bradshaw, J. & Hatland A. (eds.) *Social Policy, Employment and Family Change in Comparative Perspective*. Cheltenham, Edward Elgar.
- Brandth, B. (2007). Fedres selvutvikling og grensene mellom jobb og hjem. In: Kvande, E. & B. Rasmussen (eds.): *Arbeidslivets klemmer. Paradokser i det nye arbeidslivet*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Brandth, B. & E. Kvande. (2001). Flexible Work and Flexible Fathers. *Work, Employment and Society*. 15(2):251–267.
- Brandth, B. & E. Kvande. (2002). Reflexive fathers: negotiating parental leave and working life. *Gender, Work & Organization* 9(2):186–203.
- Brandth, B. & E. Kvande. (2003). *Fleksible fedre*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget.
- Brandth, B. & E. Kvande. (2004). Paternal leave and work-family reconciliation in a flexible working life. Working paper. Trondheim: NTNU.
- Brandth, B. & E. Kvande. (2005). Fedres valgfrihet og arbeidslivets tidskulturer. *Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning*. 46(1):35–54.
- Carneiro, P, K. Løken, K.G. Salvanes. (2009). A flying start? Maternity leave and long-term outcomes for mother and child. Working paper. Bergen: Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration.

- Christoffersen, Mogens Nygaard. (1996). *Opvækst hos fædre. En sammenligning af 3-5-årige børns opvækst hos fædre og mødre*. København. Socialforskningsinstituttet 96:23.
- Dankel, S. (2008). Diabetes kan forebygges. *Rapport*. Bergen: Høgskolen i Bergen.
- Datta Gupta, N, N. Smith, M. Verner. (2008). Perspective article: the impact of Nordic countries' family friendly policies on employment, wages, and children. *Rev Econ Household*, 6:65–89.
- Duvander, A.-Z. (2006). När är det dags för dagis? En studie om vilken ålder barn börjar förskola och föräldrars åsikt om dette. Arbetsrapport 6. Stockholm: Institutet för framstidsstudier.
- Duvander, A.-Z. & Jans, A.-C. (2009). Hur länge spelar pappors föräldraledighet roll? En studie av sambandet mellan pappors föräldraledighet och deras kontakt med sina barn. Socialförsäkringsrapport. Stockholm: Försäkringskassan.
- Ellingsæter, A. L. (2005). De “nye” mødrene og remoralisering av moderskapet. *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift*, 373–383.
- Ellingsæter, A. L. (2006). Nordiske permisjoner for foreldre – et columbi egg? *Tidsskrift for velferdsforskning*, 9:73–87.
- Ellingsæter, A.L. (2008). Om begrepet “barnets beste”. Vedlegg 1 til NOU 2008:9. *Med barnet i fokus*. Oslo: Barne- og likestillingsdepartementet.
- Ellingsæter, A.L. (2008). Symmetriske foreldreskap – politiske forhindringer. *Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning*, 52:3-32.
- Ellingsæter, A. L. & Gulbrandsen, L. (2003). Barnehagen- fra selektivt til universelt velferdsgode. *NOVA-rapport*. Oslo: NOVA.
- Ellingsæter, A.L. & L. Gulbrandsen (2005): Den lange veien – barnehage som reell valgmulighet. In: Brandth, B., B. Bungum & E. Kvande (eds.): *Valgfrihetens tid*. Oslo: Gyldendal.
- Ellingsæter, A. L. & L. Gulbrandsen. (2007). Closing the Childcare gap: the Interaction of Childcare Provision and Mother's Agency in Norway. *Journal of Social Policy* 36(4): 649–699.
- Epland, J. (2001) Barn i husholdninger med lav inntekt: omfang, utvikling, årsaker. SSB-rapport 2001/9. *SSB-rapporter*. Oslo: SSB.
- Esping-Andersen, G. (2004). Untying the Gordian Knot of Social Inheritance. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 21:115–139.
- Farstad, G. R. & K. Stefansen (2007). Ett år og klar for barnehage? Foreldres forståelser av små barns omsorgsbehov. *Barn*, 2:29–49.
- Fattore, T., J. Mason, E. Watson. (2009). When Children are Asked About their Well-being: Towards a Framework for Guiding Policy. *Child Ind Res*, 2:57–77.
- Ferranrini, T. & T. Norstöm. (2009). Family policy, economic development and infant mortality. A longitudinal comparative analysis. *International Journal of Social Welfare*.
- Felitti, V. J. (2002). The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences to Adult Health: Turning gold into lead. http://www.acestudy.org/files/Gold_into_Lead_Germany1-02_c_Graphs.pdf.

- Fleming, A. S., C. Corter, J. Stallings og M. Steiner. (2002). Testosterone and Prolactin Are Associated with Emotional Responses to Infant Cries in New Fathers. *Hormones and Behavior*, 42, 399–413.
- Fuchs, T. (2002). The Challenge of Neuroscience: Psychiatry and Phenomenology Today. *Psychopathology* 35; 319–326.
- Galtry, J. & Callister, P. (2005). Assessing the Optimal Length of Parental Leave for Child and Parental Well-Being. How Can Research Inform Policy? *Journal of family issues*, 219–246.
- Galtry, J. J. (2002). Child Health: An Underplayed Variable in Parental Leave Policy Debates? *Community, Work & Family*, 5, 257–278.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford University Press.
- Gray, P. B., Kahlenberg, S. M., Barrett, E. S., Lipson, S. F. og Ellison, P. T. (2002). Marriage and fatherhood are associated with lower testosterone in males. *Evolution and Human Behavior*; 23(3), 193–201.
- Gray, P. B., Flynn Chapman, J., McIntyre, M. H., Burnham, T. C., Lipson, S. F. & Ellison, P. T. (2004). Testosterone and human male pair bonding. *Human Nature*, 15, 119–131.
- Gray, P. B., Yang, C. –F. J. & Pope, H. G. Jr. (2006). Fathers have lower salivary testosterone levels than unmarried men and married non-fathers in Beijing, China. *Proceedings – Royal Society of London. Biological sciences*, 273, 333–339.
- Greenberg, M. & Morris, N. (1974). Engrossment. The newborn's impact upon the father. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 44, 520–531.
- Gregg, P. & J. Waldfogel. (2005). Symposium on parental leave, early maternal employment and child outcomes: Introduction. *The Economic Journal*, 115:1–6.
- Gregg, Paul, E. Washbrook, C. Propper, S. Burgess. (2005). The effects of a mother's return to work decision on child development in the UK. *The Economic Journal*, 115:
- Gulløv, E. (2003). Creating a natural place for children. An ethnographic study of Danish kindergartens. In: Olwig, K.F. & E.Gulløv (eds.). *Children's places – Cross-cultural perspectives*. London: Routledge (pp. 23–28)
- Haas, L. & P. Hwang. (1999). Parental leave in Sweden. In: Moss, P & F. Deven (eds.). *Parental Leave: Progress or Pitfall?* Brussel: NIDI CBGS Publications.
- Haas, L. & P. Hwang. (2008). "The impact of taking parental leave on fathers' participation in childcare and ties with children: Lessons from Sweden", *Community, Work & Family*, 11:85–104.
- High, P. C. (2008). School Readiness. *Pediatrics*, 121, 4.
- Hiilamo, H. (2008). *Promoting Children's Welfare in the Nordic Countries*. Reports of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland.
- Holthe, A. (2008). Kostholdsmessige utfordringer i barnehagen. Rapport. Bergen: Høgskolen i Bergen.
- Hwang, P. & B. Wickberg (2001): *Föräldrastöd och spädbarns psykiska hälsa*. Stockholm: Statens folkhälso-institut.
- Jaffee, S. R., T. E. Moffitt, A. Capsi & A. Taylor (2003): Life With (or Without) Father: The Benefits of Living With Two Biological Parents Depend on the Fathers's Antisocial Behavior. *Child Development*, 74(1), 109–126.

- Jalmert, L. & E. Olsson. (1997). *Bra pappor. Om vårdnadshavande pappor och mammor*. Stockholm: Pedagogiska institutionen
- Johansen, B. (2009). Førskolelærere om barns oppholdstid i barnehagen. *Nordisk barnehageforskning*, 2(3):99–113.
- Kavli, H. C. (2001). *En dråpe, men i hvilket hav? Kontantstøttens konsekvenser for barnehagebruk blant etniske minoriteter*. FAFO-rapport 349/2001. Oslo: FAFO.
- Kavli, H. C. (2004). Familiepolitiske dilemmaer i det fleretniske samfunnet. In: Ellingsæter, A. L. & Leira, A. (eds.) *Velferdsstaten og familien*. Oslo: Gyldendal akademisk.
- Klein, H. (1991). Couvade syndrome: male counterpart to pregnancy. *Int J Psychiatry Med*, 21: 1, 1991, 57–69.
- Kågeson, P. (2005). *Tid för barn? En analys av samhällets omsorg om de yngsta*. Stockholm: SNS.
- Lamb, M. E. (1997). The Development of Father-Infant Relationships. In: Lamb, M. E. *The Role of the Father in Child Development*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Loeb, S., M. Bridges, D. Bassok, B. Fuller & R. W. Rumberger. (2007). How much is too much? The influence of preschool centres on children's social and cognitive development. *Economics of Education Review*, 26, 52–66.
- Lundberg, O, M. Åberg Yngwe, M. Kölegård Stjärne, J. I. Elstad, T. Ferrarini, O. Kangas, T. Norström, J. Palme & J. Fritzell. (2008). The role of welfare state principles and generosity in social policy programmes for public health: an international comparative study. *The Lancet* 372:1633.
- Magnuson, K., Meyers, M., Ruhm, C. & Waldfogel, J. (2004). Inequality in preschool education and school readiness. *American Educational Research Journal*, 41, 115–157.
- Mazur, A. & Michalek, J. (1998). Marriage, divorce, and male testosterone. *Social forces*, 77, 353–363.
- Menn og likestilling – handlingsplan og bakrunnsnotat* (2008). København: Nordisk Ministerråd, TemaNord 1998:524.
- Nielsen, A. A. & M. N. Christoffersen. (2009). *Børnehavens betydning for børns udvikling. En forskningsoversigt*. København: SFI – Det Nationale Forskningscenter for velfærd.
- Nystad, W., Skrondal, A. & Magnus, P. (2001). Barnehage, infeksjon og asma. *Tidsskrift for den norske lægeforening*, 121.
- O'Brien, M. (2009). Fathers, Parental Leave Policies and Infant Quality of Life: International Perspectives and Policy Impact. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 624:190–213.
- OECD (2006). *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*.
- OECD (2009). *Doing Better for Children*.
- Prichett, L. & L.H Summers. (1996). Wealthier is healthier. *Journal of Human Resources* 31:841–868.
- Panksepp, J. (2007). Affective consciousness. In: M. Velmans & S. Schneider (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness* (s. 114–130). Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

- Paulson, J. F., Dauber, S. & Leiferman, J.A. (2006). Individual and Combined Effects of Postpartum Depression in Mothers and Fathers on Parenting Behavior. *Pediatrics*, 118 (2). 659–668).
- Qvortrup, J. (1985). Placing Children in the Division of Labour. In: Paul Close & Rosemary Collins (eds). *Family and Economy in Modern Society*. Macmillan: Houndmills, Basingstoke, pp. 129–145.
- Rege, M. & Solli, I.F. (2010). The Impact of Paternity Leave on Long-term Father Involvement. Paper. Stavanger: University of Stavanger.
- Pedersen R., C. & M. Madsen (2002). Parents' labour market participation as a predictor of children's health and wellbeing: a comparative study in five Nordic countries. *Journal of Epidemiological Community Health*, 56:861–867.
- Roe, B., L. Whittington, S. Fein, M. Teisl. (1999). Is there competition between breast-feeding and maternal employment? *Demography* 36:157–72.
- Rosemond, J. (2005). Proper Socialization Requires Powerful Love and Equally Powerful Discipline. In: Roeseke, D. R., R. J. Gelles & M. M. Cavanaugh (eds.). *Current Controversies on Family Violence*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Russell, G. (1982). Maternal employment status and fathers' involvement in child care. *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 18(2), 172–179.
- Rutter, M. L., J. M. Kreppner & T. G. O'Connor. (2001). Specificity and heterogeneity in children's responses to profound institutional privation. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 179, 97–103.
- Schiratzki, J. (2003). Barnkonventionen och barnets bästa – globalisering med reservation. In: Bengt Sandin & Gunilla Halldén (eds.): *Barnets bästa – en antologi om barndomens innebörder och välfärdens organisering*. Stockholm: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion.
- Schøitiz, A. (2003). *Folkets helse – landets styrke 1850–2003*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Skadberg, B. T. & Berstad, A. K. (2001). "Snørr og øreverk" – en plage for barnet, en byrde for samfunnet. *Tidsskrift for den norske lægeforening*, 121, 1328.
- Solli, I.F. (2010): Se, pappapermisjonen virker! Intervju i *Dagens næringsliv*, 12. januar, 2010.
- Sommer, D. (2003): *Barndomspsykologi. Udvikling i en forandret verden*. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Stefansen, K. & G. Farstad. (2008). Småbarnsforeldres omsorgsprosjekter: Betydningen av klasse. *Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning*. 49(3):344–372.
- Sundström, M. & A-Z. Duvander. (2002). Gender division of childcare and the sharing of parental leave among new parents in Sweden. *European Sociological Review*, 18:433–447.
- Swedish National Institute of Public Health. (2009). Child day-care center or home care for children 12–40 months of age – what is best for the child? A systematic literature review. Østersund: Swedish National Institute of Public Health.
- Therborn, G. (1993): The Politics of Childhood: The Rights of Children in Modern Times. In: F. Castles (ed.). *Families of Nations*, Aldershot, Dartmouth.
- Tomasello, M. (2009). *Why We Cooperate*. Cambridge: Boston Review.

- Trevarthen, C. & Reddy, V. (2007). Consciousness in Infants. In: M. Velmans & S. Schneider (eds.). *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness* (s. 114–130). Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Waldfogel, J. (2004). Social mobility, life chances and the early years. CASE paper 88. London: Center for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics.
- UNICEF. (2008). The child care transition. A league table of early childhood education and care in economically advanced countries. Innocenti Reportcard 8. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

4. Toward a Nordic childcare policy – the political processes and agendas

Guðný Björk Eydal and Tine Rostgaard

The previous chapters have compared childcare policies and their outcomes in the Nordic countries. This chapter will address the question of why childcare policies have been shaped in the way that it has. In other words, the chapter examines the underlying political processes and the agendas of the various political parties. In the literature about the driving forces of welfare state development, two types of approaches have dominated the theoretical debate: functionalism, stressing the importance of structures and whole systems, and conflict theories, stressing institutions and actors (Borchorst & Siim 2009; Esping-Andersen 1991). This chapter will adopt a conflict-theory perspective.

As discussed in previous chapters, most of the comparative literature on the welfare state presents the Nordic countries as a group or “family of nations”, due to the similar structure of their welfare systems and the elements that make up those systems (see Chapter 2 for details). At first glance, it may also look as if childcare policy is the same in all of the Nordic countries. However, as Moss and Kamerman (2009) have pointed out, major differences emerge upon closer examination. As they put it: “To make sense of the differences we need to go beyond the structural and institutional factors to the processual and the political” (op. cit., p. 8). Following their advice, the aim of the following chapter is to investigate whether the differences we have found in the childcare policies outlined in previous chapters can be explained by different politics. Do we find different political goals and aims, where governments left of the centre have ruled, compared to where governments right of the centre have been in power?

The chapter begins by discussing the theoretical perspective that “politics matters”, i.e. that the political process is important for developments in welfare systems. This will be followed by a brief discussion of Nordic co-operation and of the Nordic institutions that deal with gender and equality. The party-political motives behind childcare policy and their objectives will also be considered. Finally, the role of the various parties in shaping childcare policies in the different countries will be reviewed. In conclusion, the importance of developments in childcare policies for the Nordic welfare model as a whole will be discussed.

4.1 The role of political parties in policy-making

Why do childcare policies vary between the Nordic countries? As noted above, the academic literature on welfare posits a wide range of explanatory theories, including the theory that policy formulation is a direct result of political agendas and processes. Researchers who have studied the influence of the different parties on the development of the welfare state have referred to this theoretical perspective in somewhat different terms. For example, Castles (1982) refers to the phenomenon as “the politics matters perspective”, while Korpi and Palme refer to “the politics matters hypothesis” or “parties still matter” (Korpi & Palme 2003).

One of the more influential schools of theory emphasises the overall importance of three explanatory factors in understanding the development and shape of the welfare state – electoral support for left-of-centre parties; the ability of left-wing governments to exert influence; and the way in which the working class is organised (e.g. Esping-Andersen 1991; Korpi 1978, 2000). However, right-of-centre and centrist parties also seem have made a significant contribution to the emergence of the Nordic welfare model, for example the emphasis on universalism²¹ has historically been very much in line with the political principles of the centrist farmers’ parties. The strength of the right-of-centre parties is also assumed to have had some impact, as they are thought to oppose increased welfare spending (see e.g.

²¹ Universalism is defined as services being general (i.e. available, in principle, to all and based on either right or discretion), uniform (i.e. they do not vary between, for example, municipalities or case workers) and sufficient (i.e. they cover needs).

Castles 1978, 1982). It is important to note that other significant players take part in the policy-making process, not just political parties. As far as the development of childcare policy is concerned, trade unions and employers' federations have played a significant role for example in Finland (Lammi-Taskula 2006). The feminist movements have been influential actors in this field in the early 20th century and again in the 1960s, 1970s and onwards (Wennemo 1994; Bergqvist, Kuusipalo & Styrkárssdóttir 1999; Morgan 2009). For example, in its 2009 report the Nordic Gender Institute (NIKK) accounted for the prominent role of women's movements, interest groups and other stakeholders, such as parent groups, in shaping childcare policy in the countries concerned, (Korsvik, Rantalaiho & Bergman 2009). Various men's movements and committees that focus on men and their roles in society were also influential in policy-making in the late 1980s and 1990s (e.g. Brandt & Kvande 2009; Eydal & Gíslason 2008). In addition, a number of expert bodies have exerted influence.

Hence, all the partners have been influential in childcare policy-making at some point in time, even though the pattern or the strength of the actors in question differs among the Nordic countries. Last but by no means least, childcare policy has also been influenced by the policies of other countries, including multinational policies, such as EU directives, which have set overall targets for day-care provision and frameworks for policies on parental leave, etc. (Moss & Kamerman 2009). As the next section shows, international co-operation has also taken place at the Nordic level through extensive and formalised Nordic co-operation.

4.2 Nordic policies: co-operation on childcare and gender equality policy

The Nordic "family of nations" shares a long-standing historical and cultural heritage. Formal co-operation on family law between the countries started in the first decades of the 20th century (Bradley 1996; Melby, Pylkkänen & Rosenbeck 1999). Legislative reforms changed marriage from an institution in which the man dictated to his wife, to an institution between equal partners with mutual obligations to maintain and support each other. Thus, "[it] declared an explicit basic equality between husband and wife, father and mother, provided for no-fault divorce (after a procedure of separation) and established the principle of the best interests of

the child as the main criterion for deciding issues of custody” (Therborn 1993, 258) (see also Chapter 3 on legal developments relating to children’s rights).

This legal reform was a result of the changing status of women in the Nordic countries. Snævarr points out that:

... the women’s movements in the Nordic countries have exerted a great deal of influence on this development [...]. It is clear that Nordic marriage legislation was drawn up under the influence of the enhancement of rights in other parts of the law, and because of changing social values and women going out into the labour market. The aim was to create equality, even though it was not implemented in all spheres. (Snævarr 1983, 11)

However, despite the legal recognition of equality within marriage, other Nordic laws would continue to be based on the idea of the man as the sole breadwinner for several decades. Erlendsdóttir has pointed out that Iceland’s 1920s Marriage Act was ahead of its time – since very few women actually had jobs at the time, the law did not constitute as big a change as might be assumed (Erlendsdóttir 2000). Similarly, changes to marriage laws did not transform fathers into caregivers. They remained the family breadwinners.

Formal co-operation on family law continued among the Nordic countries, and in 1962 the countries signed the Helsinki Treaty, partly in order to harmonise Nordic family law as far as possible. To achieve this, the Nordic countries exchange information and work together on family law (Ludvigsen 2005). Nowadays the countries draw up their own national legislation, but continue to work together and exchange information and experiences (Danielsen 2005).

Thus, the countries work closely together on gender equality, including via the Nordic Council, which was established in 1952 on a Danish initiative, as a forum for inter-parliamentary partnership between the five Nordic states. “The Nordic Council is a consultative and advisory body. It issues recommendations and statements of opinion which may be addressed to the Council of Ministers or one or more of the national governments” (Arter 1999, 7). Since 1987, the national ministers responsible for gender equality have worked together in the Nordic Council of Ministers for Gender Equality (Hole 2006).

There is thus common ground on gender equality between the countries. Nordic gender-equality policy can be divided up into three main

historical phases. During the first phase, formal gender equality between men and women was established. The second phase was characterised by women joining the labour market and gaining access to the public sphere. The third phase consisted of:

..full integration of women and men at all levels of the labour market and in the private sphere, i.e. women and men sharing both economic and care responsibilities of the family, may be seen as a phase dominated by a gender reconstruction approach and gender reconstructive political measures. (Kjeldstad 2001, 79)

The Nordic gender-equality venture of the 1970s and 1980s therefore encouraged women to go out to work, and the Nordic countries enacted legislative changes to promote equality between men and women (*Women and Men in the Nordic Region*, 1988). During the same period, focus was also directed at the child's right to public day-care for its own sake, although it might also be argued that public childcare was necessary so that women could take part in working life (Sipilä 1997). As well as day-care, between 1974 and 1981, the Nordic countries also extended their leave policies, with the emphasis on the father's right to parental leave (Valdimarsdóttir 2006). Ellingsæter points out, for example, that in the case of Norway the political decision-makers moved fatherhood right to the top of the political agenda, such that "the caring father and the domestication of men is the new issue of the 1990s" (Ellingsæter in Skevik, 2003, 3).

This has had an impact on the Nordic countries' approach to achieving gender equality. The emphasis on fathers' active participation in childcare might be considered the latest extension to a policy that promotes the dual earner/carer project. The focus of the programme for Nordic co-operation on gender quality 2001–2005 was therefore women and violence on the one hand, and men and gender equality on the other. The father's role as caregiver was not discussed in depth, but one of the objectives was to devise joint campaigns to encourage men to avail themselves of their entitlement to parental leave (*Nordic Co-operation on Gender Equality 2001–2005*). However, the political strategy for the role of the father is not explicitly defined in the programme for 2006–2010. It discusses the importance of combining work and care by both parents and mentions new paternity leave schemes, but its focus is on *Gender and Power* and *Gender and Young People* (Með áherslu á kynferði er stafnt að jafnréttissamfélagi 2006).

Committees appointed by the Nordic Council of Ministers have also addressed childcare policies. For example, in 2006, the Council published a strategy for children and young people that states that its vision is “to make the Nordic Region the best place in the world for children and young people” (*Strategy for children and young people*, 2006). One example of a Nordic Council of Ministers’ project on day-care is the recent study examining initiatives in four areas that affect children’s everyday lives in day-care centres: a) local particle pollution; b) opportunities for physical activities and access to nature; c) intake of fruit and vegetables; and d) chemical substances, threshold values and labelling. The Nordic Council has also published the report *Environment and children’s health in Nordic day-care* that examines the official requirements in each of the four areas and contains recommendations relevant to the environment and children’s health (*Nordic Synergy, The day-care environment and children’s health*, 2007).

In addition to formal political co-operation, institutions and municipalities also work together and exchange ideas, as do experts and researchers in the field (Therborn 1993).

4.3 Underlying motives: the best interests of the child and parents’ labour market participation

Behind all of this political work lies a desire to exert influence. For example, the desire to increase the national birth rate was an important driver of Swedish family and population policy in the 1930s (Källemark 1980). However, even though population growth used to be an important topic in all of the Nordic countries, in recent times childcare policy has not been specifically aimed at increasing the number of births (Ellingsæter 2009).

The specific motives behind Nordic childcare policy in recent decades have concentrated more on gender equality and the best interests of the child. Originally, the idea was to protect children and make sure that the ones who lacked the requisite parental care could be looked after in public day-care institutions (Sipilä 1997). Gradually, the objective changed into ensuring the wellbeing of every child – initially by giving mothers maternity leave, which later evolved into paid maternity leave, while day-care for the few developed into day-care for all (Gauthier 1996; Sipilä 1997, see also Chapters 1, 2 and 3). Childcare policies in the Nordic countries have also been affected by the development of children’s legal rights, which has

made its mark clearly in the form of greater emphasis on children's attitudes and their participation in decision-making processes in day-care institutions, as well as on the statutory guarantee of day-care from a certain age (Kjørholt & Linden 2005, see also Chapters 2 and 3).

In recent years, there has been increased awareness in the Nordic Region of the importance and value of public-sector day-care for children's wellbeing and development. At the same time, questions have also been asked about whether day-care outside of the family is the best solution for the youngest children. Four out of the five Nordic countries have adopted laws on cash-for-care allowance for the youngest children, intended to give parents the option to care for children at home or pay a third party, for example a relative, to look after the child (see Chapter 2). Even though these new approaches differ from country to country, they are all based on ideas of the best interests of the child.

Overall, it has been generally acknowledged in all of the Nordic countries that children should be cared for by their parents during the first year (see also Chapter 3). What the new initiatives on cash-for-care have in common is that they stretch beyond the first year, and open up opportunities for care at home in the second year of the child's life. However, the importance of the cash-for-care varies according to how much day-care is otherwise available. The differences between the countries are indicated clearly by studying day-care provision and its uptake for 1–3-year-olds (Table 1). In Denmark, children often start in day-care when they are one year old (see Chapter 2). Danes also consider the ideal of professional care for the youngest children (aged 0–3) as the epitome of the good childhood (Kremer 2006). The policy in Sweden, too, has focused on children starting in a day-care programme immediately after the end of parental leave. However, the leave period is longer than in Denmark, so Swedish children often start day-care somewhat later than Danish children. In Norway, and especially in Finland, cash-for-care schemes have emphasised parental freedom of choice and the idea that as much parental care as possible is in the child's best interests. As a result, children often start day-care at a later age, especially in Finland, where relatively few children start day-care before the age of three. In Iceland, after paid parental leave, which is the shortest in any of the Nordic countries, many parents encounter difficulties when it comes to arranging day-care for their children – as a rule, day-care is not offered to children in Iceland until the age of two. Some

Icelandic municipalities have solved the issue by setting up cash-for-care schemes for families that wish to look after their child at home.

There are fewer differences between the Nordic countries in terms of their stance on what constitutes the best day-care solution for children aged three and up. In all of the countries, day-care, be it public or private, is considered as the ideal for children in this age group (see also Chapter 3). It is generally agreed that day-care is organised in a way that meets children's needs, and that it is good for them. As a result, both research and politics have focused on the importance of day-care in recent years (e.g. Guldbrandsen 2008). Day-care outside of the home is also believed to promote the integration of children from different ethnic backgrounds and of children with disabilities (see Chapter 3). For example, Kremer (2006) notes that day-care provision in Denmark does not just consist of having your child "looked after" – it is also about complementing the role of the parents in the child's upbringing, and seeking to break cycles of negative social heritage. Whether in a day-care institution or in a family day-care context, the child meets other children and learns to function in larger groups and among other people, including adults, of all ages and backgrounds. Ideally, therefore, day-care also functions as an environment in which mutual understanding can be developed across social and ethnic boundaries.

Not surprisingly, therefore, great attention is paid to the quality of day-care and how children benefit from it. For a number of years, the evaluation paradigm has also included day-care – its educational and pedagogical benefits are still continually assessed, not least in relation to how day-care affects how well prepared the child is to start school (e.g. Esping Andersen 2009). As elaborated in Chapter 2, the role of day-care has changed in parallel with a shift in the concept of childhood, and has moved away from the romantic notion of the pre-formed child to a perception of the child as individual, modern and rational, but also institutionalised (Plotz 2001; Rasmussen 2009), with day-care contributing to the maintenance of social order and the preservation of society. The day-care provision is accordingly followed very closely in the political hold – as in many other policy fields - there are explicit demands as to documentation and registration of the work that is being carried out, and the outcome.

As the following overview (Table 1) on the public support for day-care in the Nordic countries shows, the countries agree in principle on the importance of parents caring for the child at home during their first year,

although neither Finland nor Iceland provides a whole year of full-time parental leave. However, the countries diverge when it comes to looking after 1–2-year-olds. None of the countries directly prioritises looking after children aged 1–3 at home, but both Norway and Finland emphasise that parents should be able to choose to look after their children themselves.

Table 1. Childcare policies for children in different age groups in the Nordic countries, 2007

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
0–1	Paid parental leave (50–64 weeks) Day-care (17%)	Paid parental leave (44 weeks) Day-care (1%)	Paid parental leave (39 weeks) Day-care (7%)	Paid parental leave (42–52 weeks) Day-care (4%)	Paid parental leave (69 weeks) Day-care (-)
1–2	Day-care (90%)	Cash-for-care Day-care (40%)	Care gap – private solutions Municipal schemes of cash-for-care Day-care (80%)	The childcare allowance Day-care (69%)	Paid parental leave Municipal schemes of cash-for-care Day-care (70%)
3–5	Day-care (96%)	Day-care (72%)	Day-care (95%)	Day-care (94%)	Day-care (97%)

Source: NOSOSCO 2009. *In 2010, 42–52 weeks. Note: See chapter 1 for further information on paid parental leave. Day-care covers care in an institution (crèche or kindergarten, depending on age group) and family day-care.

Hence, the different definitions of children’s best interests result in different policies on the division of labour between the family and the state in the Nordic countries. Defamilisation strategies, defined as the degree to which households’ welfare and caring responsibilities are relaxed either via welfare state provision or via market provision, seems in comparison to be most evident in Denmark. If the focus is exclusively on the role of childcare policy, it should therefore also theoretically be easiest for parents in Denmark to go out to work (Esping-Andersen 1999; Kangas & Rostgaard 2007).

How does the provision of day-care, leave and benefits fit in with the parents’ perceptions of the link between them working and the “good childhood”? Academic literature often portrays the Nordic countries as sharing the same goals and values, but studies reveal considerable differences between them. In the *World Values Survey* (referred to in this study), respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with a number of statements. One of the statements was: “A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works.” Table 2, below, shows the proportion of those who agreed or strongly agreed.

Table 2. The Nordic countries 2000: Respondents who answered “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement: “A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother is works.” Stated in percentages.

	Men	Women	Ages 30–49	Total
Denmark	24	13	10	18
Finland	47	36	31	41
Norway	NA	NA	NA	NA
Sweden	46	30	35	38
Iceland	41	25	26	33

(Inglehart, Basáñez, Díez-Medrano, Halman & Luijkx 2004:D061 – A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother is working).

As shown, attitudes vary widely from country to country. Fewer respondents in Denmark agreed with the statement than in any of the other countries. The Danish result is underpinned by other research into values, for example, the *Eurobarometer* survey from 2006, which showed that only 2% of men and 2% of women aged 15–39 in Denmark supported the view that women should ideally stay at home and bring up children. By comparison, the average of the 25 countries that were EU members at the time was 14% for men and 15% for women (*Eurobarometer*, 2006). The different values and attitudes regarding the child’s best interests could contribute to understanding the differences in Nordic childcare policies. Furthermore, of the 29 countries in which the above question was asked, the Nordic countries had the lowest scores (op. cit.), which again points to the direction that values regarding the wellbeing of children plays a role in policy making.

Real-world examples show that policy reforms often reflect family life, i.e. they are more often a response to new family structures than an actual cause of change (as noted in Chapter 3; Leira 2002). Despite this, policies and available services also influence the culturally dominant ideals about who should provide care and how much of what kind of care is “good” or “appropriate” (Hochschild 2003, 333). We also know that childcare policy plays a tangible and significant role in many spheres. As other studies have demonstrated, both parental leave and day-care provision are important elements in the struggle for greater gender equality, in achieving a better balance between work and family life, and in the war on poverty (e.g. Gornick, Meyer & Ross 1997; Hatland & Bradshaw 2006; Périvier & O’Dorchai 2002; Uunk, Kalmijn & Muffels 2005).

With regard to the impact of day-care, there has been much debate about which came first, women entering the labour market or public-

sector day-care, but “... on the whole, the literature supports the theoretically driven prediction that having more attractive child care options increases maternal employment” (Gornick et al. 1997, 48). The availability of day-care has actually proven to be one of the key prerequisites for women going to work (Björnberg 1992; Bradshaw, Kennedy, Kilkey, Hutton, Corden, Eardley, Holmes & Neale 1996). Parental leave arrangements are also significant in this context, partly because, in the Nordic countries, parents are generally required to have been working before they are entitled to parental leave, which means that the programmes themselves encourage people to work (e.g. Brandt & Kvande 2009). Other studies have also revealed that it is mainly mothers who take long leaves, and that this has a considerable and negative impact on the position of mothers – as well as women in general – in the labour market. As Gornick et al. note, the basis for this hypothesis is that a policy that provides the option of long leave periods can have a negative effect on career advancement, which often relies upon a certain degree of continuity in the work place (1997, 48). It further complicates the picture that the outcome of supposedly gender-neutral programmes may be that only mothers take advantage of them. For example, despite the closer focus on family-friendly workplaces, it is primarily mothers who avail themselves of such initiatives (Smithson & Stokoe 2005).

By way of a summary, it might be said that childcare policy in general is recognised as an important part of Nordic employment and gender-equality policies, as well as an important tool in supporting both mothers and fathers in their efforts to balance work and family. For decades, the Nordic countries have worked to create equality between the genders, in both work and family life, and in both national political processes and Nordic co-operation (as mentioned above in the section on Nordic co-operation). However, the differences between the countries’ systems of day-care and parental leave point to some significant political and ideological differences in terms of what is best for the child and the family, at what point children should start day-care, and mothers’ participation in the labour market.

These differences become even more apparent when widening this focus to include the Nordic countries’ different policies on cash-for-care as an alternative to service provision. As explained in the following section, these cash-for-care programmes are criticised for militating against the objectives behind gender equality policy, since it is almost exclusively

mothers who receive the benefit, and then subsequently take long leave periods or work fewer hours.

4.4 Nordic discourse: “Use it or lose it” or freedom of choice?

Gender-equality policy in the Nordic Region has been proactive in recent years in the sense that it aims to change people’s behaviour in order to achieve gender equality. The countries have promoted a gender equality policy that created a dual-earner model, i.e. both women and men going out to work, followed by a dual-earner/dual carer model, with both parents also sharing childcare responsibilities (e.g. Leira 2006; Lewis 2001). While childcare policy has been of significant importance to the gender equality project in general, particularly to the objective of getting more women into work, it has not explicitly targeted gender equality in caring for children. Rather, its official purpose has been a gender-neutral way to meet parents’ need for support, rather than actively influencing the division of labour between them. However, in recent years there has been greater emphasis on arranging parental leave so that it is increasingly adapted to the new role of fathers as caregivers, as well as the needs of children to be cared for by both parents (Hatland & Mayhew 2006; Brandt & Kvande 2005, 2009). Thus, fathers’ role in childcare has therefore become an important and integral part of Nordic initiatives on both gender equality and children’s rights. As Folbre (2009) has pointed out, this means that feminists and other activists are now less concerned with general discrimination between the genders, and more with ensuring that day-care and leave systems are arranged so that they make it easier to share the caring responsibilities more evenly within the family.

At the same time, however, another competing discourse has emerged, about parental freedom of choice regarding the kind of day-care they deem best for their child (Moss & Kamerman 2009). To guarantee parents the opportunity to choose between day-care programmes, free-choice systems have been introduced in various forms in all of the Nordic countries, in the form of the cash-for-care schemes, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. These benefits are paid out in the period after parental leave, and they function as an alternative to day-care.

Norway is an example of a Nordic country in which the two discourses are in competition. On the one hand, Norway has a law on paid parental leave that bestows individual rights on mothers and fathers – referred to as “use-it-or-lose-it” entitlements – whereby parents lose their entitlement to a certain number of weeks off work unless they make use of them. Such schemes usually encourage fathers to use their leave, and in that way promote equality of care. On the other hand, the Norwegian cash-for-care legislation emphasises the importance of parental choice. This freedom of choice has met with criticism, and the two approaches have been described as contradictory. The parental leave system encourages fathers to take part in the care of their children, while the cash-for-care programme has led to mothers assuming primary responsibility for care and fathers assuming the breadwinner role (e.g. Ellingsæter & Leira 2006; Brandt & Kvande 2009; Borchorst & Siim 2009). Finland can be categorised along with Norway with its extensive cash-for-care schemes that are very popular, with more than 50% of children under three cared for at home under the programme (Kela – Social Insurance Institution of Finland, n.d.). In the case of Finland, the idea of a father’s quota has not gained the same political support and is not defined as relevant as in the case of Norway (Rantalaaho, 2009).

The Icelandic and Swedish childcare policies have provided less freedom of choice for parents and have promoted, quite explicitly, dual earner/carer model. The schemes of paid parental leave have promoted the participation of fathers more strongly than the Norwegian policy by allocating longer periods to fathers, and the hitherto absence of cash-for-care on a state level has confirmed this emphasis (Eydal & Gíslason 2008). Sweden could be described as a hybrid of the Nordic welfare state – with its long period of paid parental leave, including an equal number of months for mothers and fathers – and extensive public-sector childcare. However, the right-wing coalition government that came to power in 2006 amended the childcare policy in 2008, a move subsequently criticised for being contradictory in nature. On the one hand, a special equality bonus was introduced for those parents who shared their paid parental leave equally, and on the other hand, local councils were now free to offer cash-for-care schemes (Ferrarini & Duvander 2010). Similarly, some Icelandic municipalities now offer the option of the cash-for-care, which also contrasts with the purpose of the otherwise highly progressive parental leave

policy, with equal numbers of months off for both parents so that they can share care duties.

In all of the Nordic countries, day-care is currently offered as an all-day, year-round service, unlike in many other European countries, where part-time provision and long periods of closure over the summer remain the norm. The system makes it easier for Nordic parents to go out and work. Indeed, the majority of parents do work, even though some would perhaps like to spend more time at home with their children. The Danish model aims for a quick return to work after having children. Compared with the other Nordic countries, Denmark had, until the beginning of the 21st century, relatively short periods of paid parental leave (Rostgaard 2004). However, there appear to be fewer conflicts between the family's autonomy and the welfare state's paternalism than in the neighbouring countries. Danish parents do not question the norm of children being looked after outside the family from an early age (preferably all-day-care), and there does not seem to be a demand for cash-for-care schemes. When parents are asked to rank various combinations of childcare systems in order of preference, the one that attracts the least support in Denmark is the combination of public day-care institutions and cash-for-care, even though it might give them more time with the child after parental leave (Ministry of Finance, 2005). Last but not least, Danish childcare policy differs from the other countries in that, since 2002, there is no longer a father's quota in parental leave – in other words, the parents themselves decide how to divide the paid parental leave.

4.5 Party politics and childcare policies in the Nordic countries

As Leira (2006) has observed, the dual earner/carer model is an important element in the social democratic welfare state, whereas support for more traditional family forms, both in Norway and Sweden, has to a greater extent been from parties on the centre-right of the political spectrum. Thus, Ellingsæter and Leira (2006, 7):

The gender-equality model presented as predominant in Nordic parenthood policies promotes the parental sharing of both paid and unpaid work and care, and the dual-earner/dual-carer family. This is mainly a model supported by the social democrats and the left. An alternative family model, often supported by the centre-right, is also evident in policy discourse. This model is formally gender neutral, valorises unpaid work and care, and advocates making care “costless” for the carer, for example by the use of cash grants for childcare and establishing social rights and benefits for unpaid carers. Generally the policies endorsed are perceived as support for the traditional family model with mothers at home. In the mid-2000s, as parenthood policies targeting gender equality policies and ideology, in particular the ambition of gender equality in outcome, is giving way to parental choice.

In light of this, it might be expected that Nordic policy, which favours cash-for-care, few day-care institutions and no gender quotas in parental leave, would stem from right-wing governments, while a policy that emphasises both parents’ individual right to paid parental leave and high day-care capacity, as per the dual earner/carer model, would be supported by left-wing parties and governments. To determine whether this is the case, the following section investigates which political parties have played an active role in the policy-making process in the Nordic countries.

4.5.1 Political support for day-care

In the 1960s, day-care was an increasingly important theme in public debate in the Nordic countries, and throughout the 1960s and 1970s all of the countries adopted wide-ranging legislation. Denmark was the first country to do so, in 1964, followed by Finland, Iceland and Sweden in 1973 and Norway in 1975 (Broddadóttir, Eydal, Hrafnadóttir & Sigurðardóttir 1997; Sipilä 1997).

Public-sector day-care facilities have been considered one of the cornerstones of the social democratic model and the parties left of the centre, with strong support from the women’s movement, spoke out for the need to expand the services in the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, upon closer examination of public day-care in the five Nordic countries, very different models emerge (Gornick et al. 1997; Leira 1992; Rauhala, Andersson, Eydal, Ketola & Warming 1997). Denmark and Sweden led the way in this work, and have produced by far the highest volume of day-care services. Another exception is Finland, which offers a limited range of services, but emphasises all-day-care over part-time care, which is more in line with

the patterns observed in Denmark and Sweden. In Norway and Iceland, public day-care services emerged more slowly, and during the 1970s and 1980s, the main priority was the socialisation aspects rather than the needs of the labour market. Both Iceland and Norway prioritised part-time care, even for children aged 3–6 (Leira 1992; Broddadóttir et al. 1997).

Table 3. Children aged 3–6 years enrolled in full-time (FT) and part-time (PT) day-care and looked after by the family (Fam). Expressed as a percentage of all children in the age group in the Nordic countries in 1975, 1981 and 1984.

Year	1975			1981			1984		
	FT	PT	Fam	FT	PT	Fam	FT	PT	Fam
Denmark	25	7	2	31	8	8	43	8	7
Finland	9	9	3	15	10	12	17	10	4
Iceland	--	--	--	8	30	3	9	34	12
Norway	6	4	--	12	23	--	16	25	1
Sweden	12	28	6	26	24	15	33	21	19

Hanssen & Elvehøj 1997, 181, 183.

The fact that some countries have been more reticent about increasing public-sector investment in day-care also emerges clearly from studies of expenditure in the Nordic countries in the period 1950–1985.

Table 4. Expenditure on day-care institutions (DC) in 1960, 1970 and 1984, as% of GDP

	1960	1970	1984
Denmark	0.18	0.57	1.37
Finland	0.10	0.12	0.73
Iceland	0.08	0.13	0.40
Norway	0.02	0.03	0.35
Sweden	-	0.41	1.85

Data from: Co-ordination of the Nordic countries' statistics on social legislation, 1955:18; Social Welfare Statistics of the Northern Countries in 1960 (1960/61) 1964:15; Social Security in the Nordic countries in 1970 (1970/71), 1973:13; Social Security in the Nordic Countries – Scope, Expenditure and Financing in Eydal, 1984, 1987:126–140 2005. Own calculations. Note: Not available for Sweden 1960.

Table 4 reveals a general increase in expenditure. However, the differences between the countries grew during the period – in 1984, Iceland and Norway had by far the lowest expenditure, while the figures for Finland are considerably lower than for Denmark and Sweden. This is consistent with the number of day-care institutions and the large number of part-time childcare options in both countries.

In Sweden, the Social Democrats have played a key role in supporting day-care services (Moss & Kamerman 2009). Morgan (2009) points out that there has been strong conservative resistance in both Finland and Norway towards mothers working while their children are very young. According to Morgan, it was the Christian Democrats in Norway who united the conservative opposition to public-sector childcare, while the Social Democrats in Finland did not obtain a majority and therefore had to form a coalition with a centre-right farmers' party "whose rural constituency is less interested in public child care" (2009, 321). In the case of Iceland, the law on day-care was enacted by one of the few left-of-centre coalitions in the 20th century, but the right-of-centre Independence Party was the dominating party in government during the period in question (Eydal 2005).

Day-care encourages parents to work, but the ideological basis for the provision of day-care services in Denmark has increasingly emphasised that the best interests of the child are just as important, if not more so. Initially, day-care was provided to enable women to take up work, and the demand for professionalised provision of ECEC for all children went hand in hand with an accompanying increase in female labour market participation in the 1960s and 1970s. Women's organisations recognised at an early stage the importance of a state-provided system of ECEC that could substitute maternal care for children, but this agenda changed somewhat in the late 1970s. The original rationale behind setting up day-care stemmed from women's need for economic freedom through paid work, but the needs of the individual child later became a more prominent objective for women's organisations, which joined forces with experts in the field and day-care staff to advocate high standards and greater professionalism. In Denmark, both the Social Democrats and the parties right of the centre supported a family day-care model, where children are looked after in a private home by a day-care provider employed by the local council, because this offers a smoother transition for the child. However, an alliance of women's organisations and childcare workers argued instead for day-care institutions because they considered family day-care to be a less professional service and was to be an emergency solution only (Kremer 2006). The agenda for professional care services was also promoted by the influential Danish Union of Early Childhood and Youth Educators (BUPL), who could play a significant role in the corporate-based culture of the Danish political system (Kremer 2006; Bertone 2003).

Although political agendas partly explain the trend in Nordic childcare policies, the picture is nevertheless more complicated, especially since municipalities in all of the Nordic countries have considerable discretion to determine the extent of the services provided (e.g. Kröger 1997; Hansen 1997; Rostgaard & Fridberg 1998). A comparison of the political landscape covered by the many different municipalities is, however, beyond the scope and remit of this study.

Gradually, the differences between the Nordic countries have evened out (see Chapter 2), and public-sector investment in day-care is no longer a politically contentious issue. The focus of the political debate is now more on how to organise day-care provision, not whether to provide it. As the next section will show, differences remain between the Nordic countries about the extent of day-care for the youngest children. These differences are partly explained by differences in the length of paid parental leave and the introduction of schemes for cash-for-care.

4.5.2 *Cash-for-care*

Cash-for-care schemes are probably one of the clearest examples of a politically motivated decision-making process concerning childcare policy. In Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, cash-for-care legislation has been introduced by right-wing governments (Ellingsæter 2007; Haataja & Nyberg 2006; Rostgaard 2002). In Iceland, where the cash-for-care is only provided at local level, it has, in most cases, been local political parties to the right of centre that have introduced such programmes (Rannsóknastofnun um barna- og fjölskylduvernd 2010). This is in line with experiences from other countries – Morgan and Zippel (2003) have also pointed out that conservative and centre parties have been the main advocates of the cash-for-care.

In 1985, Finland became the first Nordic country to introduce a scheme for cash-for-care. When care for pre-school children came onto the agenda in Finland in the 1960s, it was stressed that parents should have the opportunity to choose between care in the home and care in day-care (Valtioneuvosto in Rantalaiho, 2009). When the day-care law was passed in 1973, it was considered a victory for the left-wing parties, especially the Social Democrats. However, the Centre Party and the conservative National Coalition Party criticised the investments in public-sector institutions and pointed out that families in rural areas would not benefit:

These parties –representing in particular upper and middle white-collar employees, and the interests of employers and farmers- demanded more possibilities for choice between home care for children and public childcare. As part of the collective income agreement in 1974-75, the home care of very young children was promoted by lengthening maternity leave substantially from 3 to 7 months ... A political compromise was gradually established in the form of a cash-for-care provision, the ‘home care allowance’ introduced in 1985 (Lammi-Taskula, 2007, p. 92).

Not all parties were in favour of the childcare allowance, but as part of a wider political settlement, it did not give rise to a heated debate in Finland the way it did in Norway in 1998 (Hillamo & Kangas 2006).

When the bill on the childcare allowance was discussed in the Norwegian parliament in 1998, one member claimed that it would generate political heat comparable to the issue of Norwegian membership of the European Union in 1994 (Håland 2005). The bill was carried by a conservative coalition government (Brandt & Kvande 2009), and strongly opposed by both Labour and the Socialist Left. As Ellingsæter (2006) points out, the debate brought the parties’ family policies into focus and that the “The main dividing line is between different ideal models of early childhood: family based care versus a parent/institutional care mix” (2006, 41).

When a red-green coalition came to power in Norway in 2005, it heralded a change of political attitudes. In its programme for government, the coalition stated that the availability of day-care centres should be increased and the cash-for-care limited to 1-2-year-olds (*Platform for coalition between the Labour Party, Socialist Left Party and Centre Party*, 2005-09, 2005). Only the former objective has been achieved, as the cash-for-care is still paid for children up to three years.

In Sweden, the Christian Democrats have also played an important role, proposing a cash-for-care bill that was adopted by the right-wing government in 2008 (Cronholm 2009). In the early 1990s, a right-wing government adopted a similar programme, but this was abolished when the Social Democrats returned to power in 1995 (Björnberg & Eydal, 1995). In a study of decision-making process in relation to the childcare allowance from a historical perspective, Hinnfors (1992) ascertains that, in 1962, Sweden’s conservative party strongly opposed the introduction of it, while the Social Democrats decided at their 1964 party congress that

they would advocate the childcare allowance. Both parties had changed their position on the matter within a decade.

In Denmark, the cash-for-care was part of a new family policy adopted by a right-wing coalition government (*Family Policy Review*, 2005). The notion of freedom of choice appeared on the agenda in the early 2000s, and the right-wing coalition government that came to power in 2003 continued to advocate it. As well as empowering municipalities to offer the cash-for-care, the new measures also introduced a right to care that transcended municipal boundaries, e.g. so that childcare could be provided close to the parents' place of work. It also introduced the right to financial support for hiring a private child-minder or subsidies to use private or not-for-profit day-care schemes (Ministry of Finance, 2005).

Iceland has not adopted cash-for-care laws, but some of the largest municipalities, which have been led by the Independence Party right of the centre, have introduced schemes (Rannsóknastofnun um barna og fjölskylduvernd 2010, see Chapter 2). No bill has been presented to the Icelandic parliament and no debate held in the chamber on the cash-for-care – the issue has only been discussed during local election campaigns.

4.5.3 Paid parental leave and the political parties

While the introduction of the cash-for-care was controversial, the idea of paid parental leave has been of such major historical significance in all of the Nordic countries that it is no longer politically controversial per se. However, there has been a heated debate in all of the countries in recent decades regarding the father's role as a carer, and the extent to which the state should take measures – and if so, which ones – to ensure that fathers are involved in care.

4.5.4 Norway

The idea of special provisions for fathers was first discussed in Norway in the 1980s as a tool to reduce gender inequality and strengthen the bonds between father and child. A committee appointed by the government in 1986 recommended that a special period of paid parental leave should be reserved for fathers (Brandt & Kvande 2009). The Norwegian parental leave system introduced in 1993 was based on a proposal put forward by the Labour Party and supported by both the Socialist Left and the Centre

Party. The right-wing parties opposed the idea of special rights to parental leave for fathers. However, all of the parties did back the time account system, on the assumption that it would increase parental choice (Elingsæter 2007).

Brandt and Kvande (2009) point out that there were many reasons why the Labour succeeded in having its proposal for quotas for fathers accepted. First, the proposal was presented as a solution that benefited the child, the father and the mother. Second: "It manifested many views and so obtained broad political consensus. The neoliberal arguments concerning free choice were not strong enough to stop it at the time. Moreover, the quota was introduced together with a general expansion of the parental leave, period, so did not require taking time from the mother" (2009, 203).

Neither the Conservative Party nor the Progressive Party voted for the bill because they believed that the programme would restrict families' freedom of choice. Brandt and Kvande (2009) also point out that the Christian Democratic Party, who supported the bill, did so because they believed that "the quota would give fathers greater insight into women's care work as carers in the homes and thus come to value it more highly" (2009, 198.) In the 2000s, the provision for fathers was gradually increased from six to ten weeks by the red-green coalition government, but the Commission for Equal Pay's proposal that paid parental leave should be divided up into three phases, as per the Icelandic model, was rejected. One of the arguments against raising the parents' individual share of the leave to two-thirds of the total has been the importance of breastfeeding. When paid leave was extended to 44–54 weeks, fierce resistance was again mounted by both the Conservative Party and the Progressives, who preferred freedom of choice over alleged coercion (Korsvik et al. 2009).

4.5.5 Sweden

In 1974, Sweden introduced the most comprehensive system of paid parental leave after the Social Democrats suggested in parliament that maternity leave be changed to parental leave. It is interesting to note that all parties in Sweden in the 1970s and 1980s discussed ways of getting fathers to take paternity leave. For example, at a national meeting of the liberal People's Party in 1975, the youth wing proposed a scheme for fathers (Swedish Government Official Reports, 2005:66). While in opposi-

tion between 1976 and 1982, the Social Democrats argued for the necessity of a scheme for fathers in order to increase their participation in child rearing, but this was rejected by the ruling right-wing coalition, which castigated the proposal “as being part of a socialist ambition to get family life more centrally controlled” (Klinth in Cronholm, 2009, 233). However, the Social Democrats did not push the matter when they returned to power, and by 1995 the liberals were advocating that a month be earmarked for fathers in the Swedish system, a proposal subsequently adopted by a right-wing government. The second month was adopted by a Social Democrat-led government in 2002. This government had considered the Icelandic model, but never presented proposals to that effect (Cronholm 2009). A new right-wing coalition came to power in 2006. As mentioned previously, a law on municipality the cash-for-care was adopted in 2008, but at the same time, the new family reforms included special bonus payments to improve fathers’ uptake of paid parental leave (see Chapter 1). It was the Christian Democrats who advocated for cash-for-care, while the liberal People’s Party supported the equality bonus (Ferrarini et al. 2010).

4.5.6 Denmark

In 1998, inspired by the Norwegian and Swedish experiences, the centre-left government introduced a two-week quota for fathers. The move was not in response to public demand for greater equality and leave rights, and the process of introduction passed virtually unnoticed by the general public, even by organisations that represented men’s interests. Nor did it give rise to disagreement in parliament, where it was adopted after the briefest of debates. Later, the fathers’ new rights to leave met with little institutional support (Rostgaard 2002).

Free choice did not really make it on to the political agenda until the early 2000s, exemplified by the right-wing and centre parties’ belief that a special fathers’ quota was tantamount to state coercion in a matter that should be a private decision about the timing of leave and the sharing of responsibilities between fathers and mothers. This led to the abolition of the programme in 2002. When it took power in 2003, the Liberal and Conservative coalition continued to accord priority to the parents’ own decision about how to share leave (Borchorst 2006). In fact, Borchorst and Siim (2009) point out that, since the change of government in 2001, the official line on gender equality has been that it already exists – except for

immigrant women who are oppressed by their own families. At the same time, Danish feminists have criticised the lack of equality in law and practice, meaning that the divide between feminists and the official position on gender equality has widened.

4.5.7 Iceland

In Iceland, the idea of special paternity leave had been brewing in parliament for years. On several occasions in the 1990s, parties left of the centre and the Women's Alliance had presented proposals for special rights for fathers to paternity leave (Eydal & Gíslason 2008). In 1997, a coalition government of the right-wing Independence Party and the centrist Progressive Party adopted a family-policy resolution that called for action to introduce paternity leave (Þingskjal 719, 1995–6). In 1998, the same government proposed a two-week period of paid paternity leave. At the 1999 general election, all of the parties represented in the parliament mentioned in their manifestoes the need for fathers to have greater rights to paid parental leave. The coalition of the centrist party and right-wing Independence Party retained their majority in parliament, and in 2000 the government presented a new draft bill on equal rights for both parents to paid leave. The bill would extend the leave period from six to nine months – fathers would have three months, mothers three, and together they would decide how the remaining three months would be shared. MPs from all parties supported the bill, which the parliament adopted in record time with only one abstention. Organisations of both employees and employers supported the bill, and the laws have enjoyed wide support in Icelandic society (Eydal & Gíslason 2008).

4.5.8 Finland

In Finland, extending the rights of fathers to paid parental leave has been discussed for years, but little real change has been implemented. According to Lammi-Taskula and Takala (2009), the main players have been the national employers' federations and trade unions, which is why the role of the government and political parties has been more passive. In addition, leave policy has been incorporated into several amendments to social legislation. Parliament has not been able to make these changes, as they

are part of tripartite bargaining agreements between the employers and the unions.

Lammi-Taskula and Takala also note that the positions of the political parties have been quite clear. Proposals to extend fathers' options have been:

“more positively viewed by left-wing and liberal political parties than by the (agrarian) Centre Party or the more conservative, right-wing parties” (2009, 99).

4.5.9 Overview: political parties and paid paternity leave

Studies show that the political parties in the Nordic countries have adopted very different approaches to the issue of special rights for fathers to paid parental leave, approaches that do not necessarily reflect the popular perception that left-wing parties support the equality model, the centre-right a more traditional family model. For example, the run-up to the introduction of special rights for fathers in Iceland and Sweden does not fit this theoretical model. The fact that, as in Iceland's case, a right-of-centre government adopted legislation that gives overwhelming priority to the dual earner/carer model rather than free parental choice challenges the idea that such policies are only implemented by social democratic and left-wing parties.

4.6 Conclusion

How important is politics? Is it possible to explain the differences in childcare policies by reference to the political spectrum from left to right? The review of the various parties and governments' political positions shows that politics does influence childcare policy, and the results favour political theory as an explanation model. At the same time, however, the results also show that the policies pursued by right-wing parties in particular are not consistent throughout the Nordic countries.

In the first place, left-wing governments have promoted policies that do enable both parents to earn and care, thus promoting the dual earner/dual carer model. In the second place, right-wing parties have backed the cash-for-care, and centre-right coalitions have adopted them, strongly

supported by the Christian parties. These results are consistent with classic theories of the left-wing parties' significance and the labour movement's strength in relation to the emergence of the Nordic welfare state. The Left's policies and underlying motives have promoted the dual earner/carer model, while the Right has backed policies that stress parental choice that in practice have paved the way for traditional division of labour, with working father and caring mothers. The right-wing parties have not opposed day-care or paid parental leave – e.g. in Denmark a right-wing government has been responsible for the highest level of day-care provision in the Nordic Region. However, at the same time, the Social Democrats and left-wing parties have opposed the idea of the cash-for-care, although that resistance has been more insistent in Norway and Sweden than in Finland. Despite opposition from the Left and feminists, the cash-for-care is now available in one form or another in all of the Nordic countries and legislation on the topic passed in all of them except Iceland. The Icelandic exception stands out, the governments right of the centre that have been in power during the 2000s have had ample opportunity to introduce legislation but did not attempt to do so.

One of the unique initiatives taken in Nordic childcare policy has been the introduction of special rights for fathers to paid parental leave – the so-called “father's quota”. The Nordic Council of Ministers for Gender Equality has actively promoted such rights. Nevertheless, the countries have followed quite different paths on the issue. Not only does the legislation behind the quotas vary, so does the party politics. Fathers' quotas have been considered to be part of a policy that actively seeks to change traditional gender roles, both at work and at home. However, they can also be considered part of the trend in all of the Nordic countries to replace family-based rights with individual social rights – or, to cite Sainsbury (1996), there has been a shift from the male breadwinner model to the individual breadwinner model. Nordic governments and parties right of the centre have also gone their own way on this issue. For example, in the early 2000s, it was a right of the centre coalition government that abolished the fathers' quota in Denmark, while in Iceland the right-of-centre coalition enacted legislation to give three months' individual and paid leave to both parents. In Sweden, the liberal People's Party has advocated individual rights for fathers, as well as special bonuses for parents to encourage them to share their rights equally between them. The right-

wing parties in Finland and Norway have not supported individual rights to paid parental leave.

The policies of the Nordic countries in 2010 might be described, in general, as somewhat contradictory in that they encompass both a dual earner/carer model and the more traditional division of responsibility (i.e. care-giving mother and working father). Time will tell what the outcome will be of this apparent clash between objectives and legislation, but it is legitimate to speculate whether the countries that have introduced the cash-for-care without a fathers' quota are migrating away from the Nordic model? Or has the introduction of the cash-for-care, as Kröger et al. (2003) claim, created a new form of universalism because it bestows new social rights and enhances parental choice?

Emphasising the dual earner/carer model has been the cornerstone of the Nordic childcare model. The authors of this report are of the opinion that if the dual earner/carer model were to be neglected or abandoned, it would have consequences for gender equality, for children, the labour market, gender roles and social networks in the Nordic countries. By way of conclusion, it is worth quoting Ferrani & Duvander (2010, 393): "Whether these new orientations are strong enough to challenge the fundamental orientations of the earner-carer model and its outcomes ought to be paid close attention by welfare state researchers as well as policy makers in different countries."

References

- Arter, D. (1999). *Scandinavian politics today*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
- Bertone, C. (2003). Claims for Child Care as Struggles over Needs: Comparing Italian and Danish Women's Organizations. *Social Politics*, 10, 229–255.
- Bergqvist, C., Kuusipalo, J. & Styrkårsdóttir, A. (1999). Debatten om barnomsorgspolitikken. In: C. Bergqvist et al. (eds.), *Likstilte demokratier – Kjønn og politikk i Norden* (pp. 129–150). Oslo: Universitetsforlaget/Nordisk Ministerråd.
- Björnberg U. (1992). Tvåförsörjarfamiljen i teori och verklighet. In: J. Acker, A. Baude, U. Björnberg, E. Dahlström, G. Forsberg, L. Gonäs, H. Holter & A. Nilsson (eds.), *Kvinnors och mäns liv och arbete* (s. 153–218). Stockholm: SNS Förlag.
- Björnberg, U. & Eydal, G.B. (1995). Family Obligations in Sweden. In: J. Millar & A. Warman (eds.), *Defining Family Obligations in Europe Social Policy Papers no. 23* (s. 359–378). Bath: University of Bath.
- Borchorst, A. (2006). The Public- Private Split Rearticulated: Abolishment of the Danish Daddy Leave. In: A. L. Ellingsæter & A. Leira (eds.) *Politicising Parenthood in Scandinavia. Gender Relations in Welfare States* (s. 101–120). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Borchorst, A. & Siim, B. (2009). Women-friendly policies and state feminism: Theorizing Scandinavian gender equality. *Feminist Theory*, 9, 207–224.
- Bradley, D. (1996) *Family Law and Political Culture – Scandinavian Laws in Comparative Perspective*. London: Sweet and Maxwell.
- Bradshaw, J., Kennedy, S., Kilkey, M., Hutton, S., Corden, A., Eardley, T., Holmes, H. & Neale, J. (1996). *Policy and the Employment of lone parents in 20 Countries*. York: Social Policy Research Unit: University of York.
- Brandth, B. & Kvande, E. (2005). Fedres valgfrihet og arbeidslivets tidskulturer. *Tidskrift for samfunnsforskning*, 46, 35–54.
- Brandth, B. & Kvande, E. (2009). The making of the fathers quota. In: P. Moss & S. Kamerman (eds.). *The politics of parental leave policies. Children, parenting, gender and the labour market* (pp. 191–206). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Broddadóttir, I. Eydal, G. Hrafnadóttir, B. & Sigurðardóttir, S. H. (1997). The Development of Local Authority Social Services in Iceland. In: J. Sipilä (ed.), *Social Care Services the Key to the Scandinavian Model*, (pp. 51–76). Aldershot: Avebury.
- Castles, F. G. (1978). *The Social Democratic Image of Society: A Study of the Achievements and the Origins of Scandinavian Social Democracy in a Comparative Perspective*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Castles, F. G. (1982). *The Impact of Parties*. London: Sage.
- Cronholm, A. (2009). Sweden: individualisation or free choice in parental leave? In: P. Moss, & S. Kamerman (eds.), *The politics of parental leave policies. Children, parenting and the labour market* (pp. 227–243). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Danielsen, S. (2005). Foreldreansvar, innhold og beslutningsmulighet ved felles forerldreansvar- felles foreldreansvar i konfliktfylte familier. *Nordiskt seminar om barnerett. Tema: Lovgivning om farskap, foreldreansvar, samvær og økonomi*.

- Likheter og ulikheter, muligheten for og nytte av lovharmonisering* (pp. 27–31). Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers: Tema Nord 2005:581.
- Ellingsæter, A. L. (2006). The Norwegian Childcare Regime and its Paradoxes. In: A. L. Ellingsæter & A. Leira, (eds.), *Politicising Parenthood in Scandinavia. Gender Relations in Welfare State* (pp. 121–144). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Ellingsæter, A. L. (2007). “Old” and “new” politics of time to care. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 17, 49–60.
- Ellingsæter A. L. & Leira A. (2006): Introduction. In: A. L. Ellingsæter & A. Leira (eds.), *Politicising Parenthood in Scandinavia. Gender Relations in Welfare States* (s. 1–18). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Ellingsæter, A.L. (2009). Leave policy in the Nordic welfare states: a ‘recipe’ for high employment/high fertility? *Community, Work and Family*, 12, 1–19.
- Erlendsdóttir, G. (2000). Sifjaréttur tuttugustu aldar. *Úlfjótur* 53,1, 11–15.
- Esping-Andersen, G. (1991). *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Esping-Andersen, G. (1999) *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Esping-Andersen, G. (2009). *The Incomplete Revolution*. Malden: Polity Press.
- Eurobarometer. (2006). *Childbearing Preferences and Family Issues in Europe*. Retrieved March 10 2010 from http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_253_en.pdf
- Eydal, G.B. (2005). *Family Policy in Iceland 1944–1984*. Göteborg: Sociologiska Institutet.
- Eydal, G. B. & Gíslason, I. V. (2008). Paid parental leave in Iceland – History and Context. In: G. B. Eydal & I. V. Gíslason (eds.), *Equal Rights to Earn and Care – Parental Leave in Iceland* (pp. 15–44). Reykjavík: Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands.
- Ferrarini, T. & Duvander, A.Z. (2010). Earner-Carer Model at the Cross-roads: Reforms and Outcomes of Sweden’s Family Policy in Comparative Perspective. *International Journal of Health Services* 40, 373–398.
- Folbre, N. (2009). Reforming Care. In: J.C. Gornick. & M.K. Meyers, M.K. (eds.) *Gender equality- transforming family divisions of labor* (pp.111–128). New York: Verso.
- Gauthier, H. A. (1996). *The State and the Family: A Comparative Analysis of Family Policies in Industrialized Countries*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Gornick, J., Meyer, M. & Ross, K. (1997). Supporting the Employment of Mothers: Policy Variations Across Fourteen Welfare States. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 7, 45–70.
- Gulbrandsen, L. (2008). The Norwegian Cash-for-Care Reform Changing behavior and stable attitudes. *Nordic Early Childhood Education Research*, 2(1), 18–25.
- Haataja, A. & Nyberg, A. (2006). Diverging Paths? The Dual-Earner/Dual-Career Model in Finland and Sweden in the 1990s. In: A. L. Ellingsæter & A. Leira (eds.), *Politicising Parenthood in Scandinavia. Gender Relations in Welfare States* (pp. 217–240). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Hanssen, J-I. & Elvehøj O-M. (1997). Appendix. A statistical summary of the development of social services for children, elderly and disabled in the Scandinavian

- countries. In: J. Sipilä (ed.), *Social Care Services- The Key to the Scandinavian Welfare Model*, (pp. 178–198). Aldershot: Avebury.
- Hatland A. & J. Bradshaw (eds). (2006). *Social Policy, Employment and Family Change in Comparative Perspective*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Hatland, A. & E. Mayhew (2006). Parental Rights and Obligations. In: A. Hatland & J. Bradshaw (eds.), *Social Policy, Employment and Family Change in Comparative Perspective* (s. 79–96). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Håland, K. (2005). Fra enighet til strid in familjepolitikken. In: B. Brandt, B. Bungum & E. Kvande (eds.), *Valgfrihetens tid. Omsorgspolitik for barn møter det fleksible arbeidslivet* (pp. 26–43). Oslo: Gyldendal.
- Hiilamo, H. & Kangas, O. (2006). *Trap for women of freedom to choose? Political frames in the making of child home care allowance in Finland and Sweden A:15/2006*, Turku: University of Turku.
- Hinnfors, J. (1992). *Familjepolitik. Samhällsförändringar och partistrategier 1960–1990*. Göteborg studies in politics 26. Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell.
- Hochschild, A. R. (2003). *The Second Shift*. Penguin Group.
- Hole, A. (2006). Lanseringskonferansen Med fokusu pa kjonn er malet et likestillt samfunn. *I Det nordiske samarbeidsprogrammet for likestilling mellom kjonnene*, Lilleström 9–10 Februar 2006. Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Inglehart, R., Basáñez, M., Díez-Medrano, J., Halman, L. & Luijkx, R. (2004). *Human Beliefs and Values*. Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno Editores.
- Kangas, O. & Rostgaard, T. (2007). Preferences or institutions? Work–family life opportunities in seven European countries, *Journal of European Social Policy* 17, 240–256.
- Kela (n.d.). Statistics on number of recipients of Home Care Allowances. Downloaded 15 December 2009 from [http://www.kela.fi/it/kelasto/kelasto.nsf/alias/Pocket_09/\\$File/Pocket_09.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.kela.fi/it/kelasto/kelasto.nsf/alias/Pocket_09/$File/Pocket_09.pdf?OpenElement)
- Kjeldstad, R. (2001). Gender policies and gender equality. In: M. Kautto, J. Fritzell, B. Hvinden, J. Kvist & H. Uusitalo (eds.) *Nordic Welfare States in the European Context*, (pp. 66–97). London: Routledge.
- Kjørholt, A. T. & Lindén, H. (2005). Children and Youth as Citizens: Symbolic Participants or Political Actors? In: H. Brembeck, B. Johansson & J. Kampmann (ed.) *Beyond the Competent Child Exploring Contemporary Childhoods in the Nordic Welfare Societies*, (pp. 63–87). Roskilde: Roskilde University Press.
- Korpi, W. (1978). *The Working Class in Welfare Capitalism: Work, Union and Politics in Sweden*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Korpi, W. (2000). The Power Resources Model. In: C. Pierson & F. G. Castles (eds.), *The Welfare State Reader* (pp. 77–89). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Korpi, W. & Palme, J. (2003). New Politics and Class Politics in the Context of Austerity and Globalization: Welfare State Regress in 18 Countries, 1975–1995. *American Political Science Review*, 97, 425–46.
- Korsvik, T. R., Rantalaiho, M. og Bergman, S. (2009). *Research on political actions and claims by women´s movements and others NGOs in childcare and parental leave issues in Norway and Finland since the 1960s*. Oslo: Nordic Gender Institute.

- Kremer, M. (2006). The Politics of Ideals of Care: Danish and Flemish Child Care Policy Compared. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society* 13, 261–285.
- Kröger, T. (1997). Local Governments in Scandinavia: Autonomous or Integrated into the Welfare State? In: J. Sipilä (ed.), *Social Care Services the Key to the Scandinavian Model* (pp. 95–108). Aldershot: Avebury.
- Kröger, T., Anttonen, A. & Sipilä, J. (2003). Social care in Finland: Weak and Strong Universalism. In: A. Anttonen & J. Baldock & J. Sipilä (eds.) *The Young, the Old and the State: Social Care Systems in Five Industrial Nations* (pp. 25–54). London: Edward Elgar.
- Källemark, A-S. (1980). *More Children of Better Quality Aspects of Swedish Population Policy in the 1930s*. Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell.
- Lammi-Taskula, J. (2006). Nordic men on parental leave: can the welfare state change gender relations? In: A.L. Ellingsæter & A. Leira (eds.), *Politicising Parenthood in Scandinavia. Gender Relations in Welfare States* (pp. 79–100). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Lammi-Taskula, J. (2007). *Parental leave for fathers? Gendered conceptions and practices in families with young children in Finland*. Helsinki: STAKES.
- Lammi-Taskula, J. & Takala, P. (2009). Finland: negotiating tripartite compromises. In: P. Moss & S. Kamerman, (eds.), *The politics of parental leave policies. Children, parenting and the labour market* (pp. 87–102). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Leira, A. (1992). *Welfare States and Working Mothers: The Scandinavian Experience* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leira, A. (2002). *Working Parents and the Welfare State – Family Change and Policy Reform in Scandinavia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leira, A. (2006). Parenthood Change and Policy Reform in Scandinavia, 1970s–2000s. In: Ellingsæter, A. L. & A. Leira (eds.), *Politicising Parenthood in Scandinavia. Gender Relations in Welfare States* (pp. 27–52). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Lewis, J. (2001). The decline of the male breadwinner model: implications for work and care. *Social Politics*, 8, 2, 152–169.
- Ludvigsen, S. (2005). Seminarier. *Nordiskt seminar om barnerett. Tema: Lovgivning om farskap, foreldreansvar, samvær og økonomi. Likheter og ulikheter, muligheten for og nytte av lovharmonisering* (pp. 9–10). Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers: Tema Nord 2005:581.
- Melby, K., Pylkkänen, A. & Rosenbeck, B. (1999). Inledning. In: K. Melby, A. Pylkkänen & B. Rosenbeck (eds.), *Ægteskab i Norden fra Saxo til i dag Nord 1999:14* (pp. 9–17). København: Nordisk Ministerråd.
- Með áherslu á kynferði er stefnt að jafnréttissamfélagi* (2006). Norrænt jafnréttissamstarf 2006–2010. Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Ministry of Finance* [Finansministeriet]. (2005). *Det Mener Brugerne! Brugertilfredshed med Dagpansnings-, Skole- og Ældreområdet*. København: Finansministeriet.
- Morgan K. & K. Zippel (2003). Paid to Care: The Origins and Effects of Care Leave Policies in Western Europe. *Social Politics*, 10, 1, 49–85.
- Morgan, K. (2009). *The Political Path to a Dual-Earner/Dual-Carer Society: Pitfalls and Possibilities*. In: J. C. Gornick & M. K. Meyers (eds.) *Gender equality- transforming family divisions of labor* (pp. 317–339). New York: Verso.

- Moss, P. & Kamerman, S. (eds.). (2009). *The politics of parental leave policies. Children, parenting and the labour market*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- NOSOSKO 2007–8. (2009). *Social Protection in the Nordic Countries 2007–2008. Scope, expenditure and financing*. Copenhagen: Nordic Social-Statistical Committee.
- Nordic co-operation on Gender Equality* [Nordisk likestillingssamarbeide] 2001–2005. (2001). Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Nordic Synergy, the day-care environment and childrens health* [Miljø og sundhed i nordiske børnehaver] *TemaNord* 2007:533. (2007). København: Nordisk Ministerråd.
- Plattform for regeringssamarbeidet mellom Arbeiderpartiet, Sosialistisk Venstreparti og Senterpartiet, 2005–09*. (2005). Oslo: Stortinget.
- Plotz, J. (2001). *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*. New York: Palgrave.
- Périvier, H. & O’Dorchai, S. (2003). Womens Employment and Public Policies. In: D. Meulders & S. Gustafsson (eds.), *The rationale of motherhood choices: Influence of employment conditions and of public policies* (pp. 85–124). Luxemburg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Rantalaiho, M. (2009). *Kvoter, valgfrihet, fleksibilitet. Indre spenninger I den nordiske familiepolitikken*. København: NIKK.
- Rannsóknastofnun um barna- og fjölskylduvernd. (2010). *Umömun ungra barna í Reykjavík. Hluti II: Rannsókn RBF fyrir Leikskólasvið Reykjavíkurborgar 2009–2010*. Reykjavík: Rannsóknastofnun um barna- og fjölskylduvernd.
- Rauhala, P.-L., Andersson, M., Eydal, G. B., Ketola, O. & Warming, H. (1997). Why Are Social Care Services a Gender Issue? In: J. Sipilä (ed.), *Social Care Services the Key to the Scandinavian Model* (pp. 131–155). Aldershot: Avebury.
- Rasmussen, K. (2009). Om barndommens institutionalisering – og noget om dens affortryllelse. In: S. Højlund (ed.), *Barndommens organisering – i et dansk institutionsperspektiv* (pp. 149–172). Roskilde: RUC.
- Rostgaard, T. & Fridberg T. (1998). *Caring for Children and Older People. A Comparison of European Policies and Practices Social Security in Europe* 6. Copenhagen: The Danish National Institute of Social Research.
- Rostgaard, T. (2002). Setting Time Aside for the Father: Father’s Leave in Scandinavia. *Community, Work and Family*, 5, 343–364.
- Rostgaard, T. (2004). *With Due Care -Social Care for the Young and the Old across Europe. PhD Thesis*. Odense: Southern Danish University.
- Sainsbury, D. (1996). *Gender Equality and Welfare States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sipilä, J. (ed.). (1997). *Social Care Services- The Key to the Scandinavian Welfare Model*. Aldershot: Avebury.
- Skevik, A. (2003). Children of the welfare state: Individuals with entitlements, or hidden in the family? *Journal of Social Policy*, 32, 423–40.
- Smithson, J. & Stokoe, E. H. (2005). Discourses of Work-Life Balance: Negotiating “Genderblind” Terms in Organisations. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 12, 2, 147–168.
- Snævarr, Á. (1983). *Fyrirlestrar í síffarétti I*. Reykjavík: Fjölrit.

- Strategy for children and young people.* (2006). Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Swedish Government Official Reports [SOU] 2005:66.* (2005). Makt att forma samhället och sitt eget liv - jämställdhetspolitiken mot nya mål. Stockholm: Fritzes
- Therborn, G. (1993) Politics of Childhood: The Rights of Children in Modern Times. In: F.G. Castles (ed.), *Families of Nations – Patterns of Public Policy in Western Democracies* (pp. 241–293). Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing Company.
- Uunk, W., Kalmijn, M. & Muffels, R. (2005). The impact of young children on women's labour supply: A Reassessment of Institutional Effects in Europe. *Acta Sociologica.* 48,1, 41–62.
- Valdimarsdóttir, F.R. (2006). *Nordic experience with parental leave and its impact on men (TemaNord 531)*. Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Wennemo, I. (1994). *Sharing the Costs of Children Studies on the Development of Family Support in the OECD Countries*. Stockholm: Swedish Institute for Social Research.
- Women and Men in the Nordic Region* [Kvinnor och män i Norden – Fakta om jämställdheten 1988:8.] (1988). Stockholm: Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Þingskjal 719. (1995–1996). Tillaga til þingsályktunar. *Alþingistíðindi A-deild, 120.*

Appendix A

The registry data that are available should not be used to make direct comparisons between countries, and should be interpreted with great caution. It might be interesting to conduct a survey of available statistics of registry data from the statistical offices of each Nordic country, at least as a starting point for how statistics in the Nordic countries could be developed and co-ordinated.

In Denmark, Statistics Denmark is responsible for statistics on parental leave. The office has created a measure for presenting the use of parental allowance during the first two calendar years. This means mean that children born in January are followed for a longer period than those born in December, but according to the statistical office, this method nevertheless succeeds in covering the greatest proportion of parental leave used during that period. It appears that the number of days used by mothers and fathers has remained stable since the beginning of the 2000s until today; approximately 275 days among mothers and slowly inching up among fathers, from 19 to 24 days (statistikbanken.dk). It is not possible to assess the significance of the annulment of the “father’s weeks” for fathers’ leave use, because parental leave was simultaneously extended, making it more possible for fathers to use part of the leave.

In Finland, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, Kela (kela.fi), compiles information about parental leave use. Each year, in its annual statistics, Kela presents information about leave users, chiefly by region, employment sector, recipient’s age, as well as the average compensation level among mothers and fathers. Because the office does not have information on non-using parents, it is difficult to compare the data, but we do find, for example, relatively noticeable regional variation and the expected gender differences in terms of compensation level, age and sector.

In Iceland, statistics are issued by Childbirth Leave Fund (faedingarorlof.is), but also in the form of regularly published reports by universities and the gender equality authority (cf. Eydal & Gíslason 2008, Gíslason 2007). After the reform of 2000, fathers’ leave use has increased dramati-

cally, and the pattern in which fathers use one-third and mothers use the rest seems to be stable.

In Norway, the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service, NAV (nav.no), has been responsible for keeping statistics on parental leave since 2006. Among other things, they publish the number of users of parental leave in the first half of each year, divided according to county and gender. Also given is the distribution of leave days by categories, which clearly reflect significant changes in fathers' leave use as a result of the stage-wise increases in leave weeks granted to fathers. Nevertheless, few fathers appear to use more than the portion that would otherwise be lost, a pattern also found in Iceland and Finland (Eydal & Gíslason 2008, Salmi, Lammi-Taskula & Närvi 2009).

In Sweden, on the other hand, there are signs that a growing group of parents is sharing the parental allowance period more equally than what is expected when only considering the quota months. The National Social Insurance Agency (Försäkringskassan) is the authority responsible for keeping statistics on parental allowances, and the information is published both in its annual report and as part of the statistics available on the homepage (forsakringskassan.se). The statistics show the average number of days, compensation level by gender, age and county. The annual reports show more detailed information on specific years, for example how many people are dividing the parental allowance equally, which is defined as somewhere between 40 and 60% of the total number of days used. This share has grown and is now close to 9%, when considering at the first three years of a child's life. Because fathers began to use parental leave earlier in Sweden than in the other Nordic countries (Figure 3), this could suggest that it takes time until such patterns develop. It may also suggest that Sweden has now reached a level in fathers' leave use that leads to a further strengthening of the pattern. It is possible that the same could be true in Norway and Iceland.



norden

Nordic Council of Ministers

Ved Stranden 18
DK-1061 Copenhagen K
www.norden.org

Parental leave, childcare and gender equality in the Nordic countries

The Nordic countries are often seen as pioneers in the area of gender equality. It is true that the position of women in Nordic societies is generally stronger than in the rest of the world. There is an explicit drive in most – or perhaps all – areas of society to promote and strengthen equality between women and men. In recent years, some significant changes have occurred on the family front, where men now assume a greater share of childcare, household work and other tasks that used to be primarily women's domain.

Occasionally, we hear questions in the context of public debate as to whether the investments we have made to ensure equal opportunities, rights and obligations for women and men have in fact occurred at the expense of children. This concerns particularly the expansion of childcare and the system of shared parental leave.

This book addresses some of these questions through an overview of political and policy developments in Nordic parental leave and childcare. In addition, the book describes research on the situation of Nordic children and their wellbeing as viewed through international comparisons.

This book is the outcome of a joint-Nordic project coordinated by editors Guðný Björk Eydal and Ingólfur V. Gíslason. Its other contributors are Berit Brandth, Ann-Zofie Duvander, Johanna Lammi-Taskula and Tine Rostgaard.

TemaNord 2011:562
ISBN 978-92-893-2278-2

