Sweden

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For comparisons with other countries in this review – on demographic, economic, employment and gender equality indicators and on leave provision and early childhood education and care services - go to cross-country comparisons page on website. To contact authors of country notes, go to membership-list of members page on website.

1. Current leave and other employment-related policies to support parents

a. Maternity leave (graviditetsspennning) (responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs)

It is obligatory for women to take two weeks leave before or after delivery; they can decide whether or not to take part of the paid parental insurance benefit during this period of leave. Pregnant women can take indefinite leave paid at 80 per cent of earnings if a job is a risk to the foetus and no other work can be made available. If a job is physically demanding and therefore hard for a pregnant woman to perform, she is eligible to take up to 50 days of leave during the last 60 days of pregnancy paid at 80 per cent of income. See footnote for Parental leave.

b. Temporary leave in connection with a child’s birth or adoption (tillfällig föräldrapenning i samband med barns födelse eller adoption) (responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs)

Length of leave

- Ten days. Designed to be used to attend delivery, care for other children while mother is in hospital, stay over in the hospital in a family room after childbirth and/or participate in childcare when the mother comes home.

Payment and funding

- Eighty per cent of earnings up to an earnings ceiling of SEK333,700 (€39,277) per year (see ‘Parental leave’ for reduction of payment to 77.6 per cent).

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2 Referred to as ‘Paternity leave’ in earlier reviews; revised here to provide literal translation of entitlement, which is gender-neutral

3 Conversion of local currency into Euros undertaken on 28 May 2013, using http://finance.yahoo.com/currency-converter/
• Payments come from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency. Employers and the self-employed make contributions for this purpose; employers pay 31.42 per cent on all employees' earnings, of which 2.2 per cent is earmarked for 'parental insurance'. The government meets any shortfall.

Flexibility in use

• Leave can be used at any time during the first 60 days after childbirth.

Eligibility (e.g. related to employment or family circumstances)

• All employees are eligible, regardless of time in employment.
• The benefit is gender neutral, being for the second parent or another close person if the second parent is unknown.

Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g. multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or mother; lone parent); or delegation of leave to person other than the mother

• Leave is doubled in the event of twins.

c. Parental leave (föräldraförsäkring) (responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs)

Length of leave (before and after birth)

• Each parent is entitled to take leave from work until their child is 18 months old. In addition, there are 480 days of paid leave per family. Sixty days are reserved for each parent and cannot be transferred (often called mammamånader or a 'mother's quota'; and pappamånader or a 'father's quota,'). Out of the remaining 360 days, half are reserved for each parent; if days are transferred from one parent to another, the parent giving up his or her days must sign a consent form.
• Parents may use the paid leave at any time until a child's eighth birthday or the end of the first school year. So parents can choose to use their paid leave entitlement before or after the child is 18 months.

Payment and funding

• For eligible parents (see below), 390 days at 80 per cent of earnings up to an earnings ceiling of SEK445,000 (€51,864) per year⁴; the remaining 90 days at a flat-rate payment of SEK180 a day (€21). A special formula, introduced in January 2008 and applied to all parts of parental insurance, reduces earnings by 3 per cent before calculating the 80 per cent payment. Non-eligible parents receive SEK225 (€26) a day for 480 days.
• Funding as for Temporary Leave in Connection with Birth and Adoption.
• A ‘Gender Equality Bonus’ (jämställdhetsbonus) offers an economic incentive for families to divide Parental leave more equally between the mother and the father. Both parents receive 50 SEK (€6) each per day for every day they use the leave equally. The bonus applies to the 390 days of earnings-related leave after the two reserved months are used by each parent (i.e., 270 days). When parents share the leave equally the bonus is worth a maximum of SEK 13,500 (€1,573).

⁴ The ceiling for Parental leave is higher than for temporary leave in connection with a child’s birth or adoption to encourage use of Parental leave by fathers.
Flexibility in use

- The length of leave is counted in days (rather than weeks or months) to enhance flexibility of use.
- Paid and unpaid leave can be combined to enable parents to stay at home longer.
- Paid leave can be taken at any time until a child’s eighth birthday or the end of the first school year.
- Parents can take paid leave full time, half-time, quarter-time or one-eighth time, with the length of leave extended accordingly (e.g. one day of full-time leave becomes two days of half-time leave and four days of quarter-time leave).
- Parents can take leave in one continuous period or as several blocks of time. An employee taking Parental leave has the right to stay away from work for a maximum of three periods each year. Many employers allow for more periods.
- Two parents can take up to 30 days of leave at the same time, until the child reaches one year of age. These days have been labelled “double days” (dubbeldagar).

Eligibility (e.g. related to employment or family circumstances)

- All parents are entitled to paid Parental leave, but paid leave at 80 per cent of earnings requires parents to have had an income of over SEK225 (€26) a day for 240 days before the expected date of delivery or adoption. A parent remains qualified to the same level of Parental leave if an additional child is born or adopted within 30 months of the birth or adoption of an earlier child; this is economically significant mainly to parents who reduce working hours (and income) after the first child since it keeps them at a higher benefit level. This is commonly referred to as the ‘speed premium’.

Variation in leave due to child or family reasons (e.g. multiple or premature births; poor health or disability of child or mother; lone parent); or delegation of leave to person other than the parents

- Families with multiple births are entitled to additional paid leave (in the case of twins, an additional 90 days at 80 per cent of earnings and 90 days at a flat rate of SEK180 (€21) a day; for each additional child in a multiple birth, parents are entitled to an additional 180 days at 80 per cent of earnings.
- If only one parent has custody of the child, he or she can use all the Parental leave days.

Additional note (e.g. leave payments are often supplemented by collective agreements; employer exclusions or rights to postpone)

- Parental leave pay has been negotiated in collective bargaining agreements in the public sector and is commonplace in the private sector. A common collective agreement is that the employer pays 10 per cent extra under the ceiling (i.e., workers receive 90 per cent of earnings) and up to 90 per cent above the ceiling\(^5\).

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d. Childcare leave or career breaks

- In 2008, a municipal child-raising allowance (vårdnadsbidrag) was reinstituted. Starting in 2009, municipalities could choose whether or not to provide a benefit of up to SEK3,000 (€350) per month for parents with a child aged one to three years who do not use publicly-funded childcare services and for whose child 250 days of Parental leave have already been used. The allowance cannot be used simultaneously with Parental leave and is conditional on the other adult in the household (not necessarily the other parent) working or studying.

e. Other employment-related measures

Adoption leave and pay

- Cohabiting adoptive parents get five days each at the time of adoption; a single adoptive parent gets ten days, considered to be part of temporary (paid) Parental leave (tillfällig föräldrapenning) (see below). Adoptive parents may use this leave until the child is ten years old.

Time off for the care of dependents

- Temporary Parental leave (tillfällig föräldrapenning) is available at 120 days per child per year for children under the age of 12, and for children aged 12 to 15 with a doctor's certificate. This is paid at 80 per cent of earnings, up to an earnings ceiling of SEK333,700 (€39,277) per year; it is a family entitlement and it can be used to care for sick children. Sixty of these days can also be used to stay home with young children if the regular caregiver is sick. Since 2001, it can be offered to someone outside the family if they are an eligible person in the social insurance system. The ten days of temporary parental leave associated with birth or adoption (see 1b) also come under this category of temporary Parental leave.

- Parents whose children are sick or functionally disabled for more than six months can elect to receive a care allowance (vårdbidrag) from the birth of the child until the child reaches the age of 19 years. The maximum amount parents can receive per year is SEK111,250 (€12,966).

Flexible working

- Until a child reaches the age of eight years or completes the first grade of school parents have the right to reduce their normal working time by up to 25 per cent; there is no payment for working reduced hours.

2. Relationship between leave policy and early childhood education and care policy

The maximum period of paid post-natal leave available in Sweden is around 16 months, with 13 months paid at a high rate. There is an entitlement to ECEC from 1 year of age, available on a full-time basis in centres or at licensed family day carers to employed parents (or part-time if parents are not employed). Consequently, there is no gap between the end of leave and an ECEC entitlement. Levels of attendance at formal services for children under 3 years are well above the average for the countries included in this review and for OECD countries; and above average for children over 3 years. For actual attendance levels, see ‘relationship between leave and ECEC entitlements’ on cross-country comparisons page.
3. Changes in policy since April 2012 (including proposals currently under discussion)

Since 1st January 2013, Temporary Parental Leave can be used without a signature certifying absence from the child’s regular caregiver (preschool or home childcare provider). The Swedish Social Insurance Agency has also made it simpler to apply for parental leave insurance, for example by icons on mobile phones.

There is increased discussion about possible measures to make the leave use more gender equal; for example, increasing the reserved months for each parent has been mentioned. No specific proposals have yet been made by the present government.

4. Take-up of leave

a. Maternity leave

In 2010, 20 per cent of pregnant women took pre-birth leave for an average of 39 days6.

b. Temporary leave at the birth or adoption of a child

For all children born in 2011, 75 per cent of fathers, same-sex partners or other designated person took this leave (footnote 5). Only employed parents are eligible, but no figures exist on the proportion of eligible fathers using this leave.

c. Parental leave and childrearing benefit

Almost all families use paid Parental leave in Sweden today. Although it is possible to use this benefit until a child reaches the age of eight years or after the first school year is ended, the majority of parents take the main part of the leave before their child reaches the age of two years (all children are entitled to a childcare place from 12 months of age).

In 2011, the vast majority of women (93 per cent) and men (98 per cent) who took Parental leave were entitled to benefits at the earnings-related compensation level as opposed to the low flat-rate level. Foreign-born parents, especially mothers, are more likely than native-born parents to have access to only the low-flat-rate level (footnote 6).

For children born in 2001, parents used 92 per cent of the 360 days that are paid at a high earnings-related rate, and 69 per cent of the days that are paid at a low flat-rate level. Parents of foreign background are less likely to use all their days than native Swedes7.

The great majority of fathers of children born in 2004 (88.3 per cent) took Parental leave at some stage before their child’s eighth birthday, mainly starting when their children were 13 to 15 months of age. Fathers to children born in 2003 took on average 91 days of Parental leave during the eight years they could use the leave, and mothers took 342 days (footnote 7). In 2011, 44 per cent of Parental leave benefit recipients were men, compared to 56 per cent who were women (footnote 6), though on average mothers took 95 days and fathers 37 days. So mothers still take most Parental leave, although the proportion of total days used by men has slowly increased: in 1987, fathers took about seven per cent of all Parental

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leave days used in that year; by 2011, it had increased to 24 per cent \(^8\). The percentage of couples that are sharing Parental leave fairly equally (40-60 per cent) is very slowly increasing, with 12 per cent of couples equally sharing leave for children born in 2008 \(^9\).

The average father received benefits of SEK620 (€72) per day in 2011, while the average mother received benefits of SEK459 (€53)\(^5\).

In 2012, the Gender Equality Bonus was received for 151,138 children. In these cases both parents had used more than their 60 reserved days; this represents 56 per cent of parents eligible for the bonus, up slightly from 54 per cent in 2011. On average, women received SEK 3,600 (€420) in bonus compared to SEK 4,800 (€559) for men (www.forsakringskassan.se).

Fathers with higher education take more Parental leave, as do fathers whose partners have higher levels of education and higher income. Fathers taking no leave are more likely to have been born outside Sweden. Unemployed fathers generally take less leave than other fathers. Fathers who work in the public sector are more likely to take leave, perhaps because they more often get extra compensation as a result of collective agreements. Fathers are more likely to take Parental leave for a first child (Footnote 8).

The introduction of a father's quota in 1995 (one month) and its extension in 2002 (to two months) both led to more fathers taking more leave; though the second month had a less dramatic effect than the first. The introduction of the Gender Equality Bonus had no similar effects during its first 18 months \(^10\).

Only about one third of Swedish municipalities have decided to offer the child-raising allowance. Relatively few parents appear to take advantage of this benefit. A study of 96 municipalities who instituted the allowance in 2009 found that parents received this allowance for 6,694 children in 2011 \(^11\), accounting for 1.9 per cent of all children aged one to three-years old in these municipalities. The vast majority (92 per cent) of the parents who applied for the allowance were women; 40 per cent of applicants had foreign backgrounds (compared to 27 per cent of parents in Sweden generally).

d. Other employment-related measures

Mothers are more likely than fathers to work part-time hours (34 hours or less per week); 45 per cent of employed mothers with two children, the youngest being one to two years old, worked part time in 2009, compared to only seven per cent of employed fathers \(^12\). A recent study of 20,000 parents found that 28 per cent of mothers but only two per cent of fathers of children aged two to seven years chose to work reduced hours (30-36 hours) because they had children; no distinction is made in this study between parents who have used their entitlement to work part time and those who have come to working part time through other

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When temporary Parental leave is used to care for sick children, it is more often used by mothers, who took 64 per cent of all days taken in 2011 (footnote 5).

Parents are increasingly using the care allowance to care for children with longer-term illness or disability (vårdbidrag); in 2011 it was paid to the parents of 46,794 children (footnote 5).

5. Research and publications on leave and other employment-related policies since April 2012

a. General overview

The research conducted during the three decades of Swedish Parental leave has mainly focused on comparing mothers’ and fathers’ use of Parental leave, as a major issue has been the unequal sharing of Parental leave days between women and men. Over time, the impact of Parental leave on various outcomes, notably fertility, has received increased attention. Recent research has involved evaluations of the gender equality bonus and home care allowance.

b. Selected publications since April 2012


Since the introduction of Parental leave in Sweden a more gender-equal division of such leave has been targeted. In 1995 one month was reserved for each parent, implying that the month was forfeited if not used by the same parent. A second month was reserved in 2002. In 2008, a gender equality bonus was introduced, meaning that tax credits were given to parents who shared the leave equally. This study investigates the effects of these reforms on Parental leave use by means of a natural experiment approach with parents of children born just before and after the introduction of each reform. Register data from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency is used, including all parents residing in Sweden. The results indicate a strong effect from the first reserved month, a more modest but clear effect from the second reserved month and, so far, no effect from the gender equality bonus.

Fahlén, S. (2012) Facets of work-life balance across Europe. How the interplay of institutional contexts, work arrangements and individual resources affect capabilities for having a family and for being involved in family life. Dissertation 53, Department of Sociology, Stockholm University

This dissertation explores dimensions of work–life balance in Europe; two of the four papers contained within it focus on Sweden. One paper examines the impact of family-friendly working conditions on young women’s fertility in Sweden, showing the importance of family-friendly working conditions for less educated women. Another paper compares Hungary and Sweden and finds that Swedish parents experience a stronger sense of entitlement to work-family balance compared to Hungarian parents, which reflects country differences in policies, working time regimes, and norms regarding work and care.

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Women account for the majority of Parental leave take-up, which is likely to be one of the major reasons for the gender earnings gap. Consequently, many countries are trying to promote a more gender equal division of Parental leave. Indeed, the last decades have seen an increase in fathers’ take-up of Parental leave benefits, but the gender earnings gap has remained fairly constant. This paper re-evaluates the labour supply responses of both mothers and fathers to three major reforms in the Swedish Parental leave system, recognizing that take up of paid leave might not fully reflect actual time off from work in a system where job protection exceeds paid leave. It finds that both mothers and fathers have decreased their labour supply to the same extent as a response to an increase in paid Parental leave without gender restrictions. In contrast, the study finds no support for any changes in fathers’ labour supply due to reforms introducing gender quotas in paid leave.

This paper examines the effect of the child’s gender on fathers’ Parental leave use. Findings indicated that fathers took slightly more Parental leave days (.6) if the child was a first-born son.

This paper looks at how Parental leave policies in Sweden have influenced men’s visits/activities at Child Health Centers during the child’s first year. Despite the Child Health Centers’ policy of including both parents, fathers do not utilize the Centers to the same extent as mothers. Barriers for why father involvement is lower than mothers are discussed.

The authors compare outcomes in a two large cohorts of families of newborns before and after fathers were offered one non-transferable month of Parental leave in 1995, following up each cohort for eight years. They found that the reform dramatically increased fathers’ Parental leave use; the share of fathers who took no leave dropping dramatically because of the reform, from 54 per cent to 18 per cent, and the share of fathers who took at least one month of leave increasing from nine to 47 per cent. Fathers’ earnings did not impact their tendency to take leave, dispelling a widely-held belief that this can be an obstacle. Fathers tended to take more leave around Christmas and during the summer months and during children’s second year of life. Fathers who were part of the cohort with the daddy’s month were no more likely to take paid days to care for sick children than fathers who were part of the pre-reform cohort. Mothers’ and fathers’ employment rates and wages were also not found to be significantly different in the two cohorts, suggesting that the reform did not have the expected impact on gender equality in the labor market.

Trade unions have traditionally been male-dominated organizations serving men’s interests as family breadwinners, primarily through wage-setting. This study explores whether Swedish unions have contested the gendered division of parenting to develop values and practices that support men as caregivers. A mail survey of local unions revealed that the vast majority did not believe it was important to focus attention on men as family caregivers. Only about a quarter reported activities to improve men’s knowledge of Parental leave benefits; only about one-third reported that they helped to implement Parental leave at the
workplace and only about a quarter had negotiated contracts that extended leave benefits for fathers. Unions were more active in supporting fathers' taking Parental leave when they prioritized women's equal employment opportunities and when fathers requested union help. Stronger unions were more likely than others to have won enhanced benefits. Swedish unions are in a strong position to promote, help implement and extend parental leave benefits for fathers, but this potential has not yet been realized.

This chapter describes the development of social policies (especially Parental leave) affecting fathers in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. It assesses the impact of policy on fathers' participation in childcare and the realization of the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model and also analyzes workplace barriers still preventing Scandinavian fathers from becoming equal parents.

This paper evaluates how access to paid Parental leave affects labor market entrance for immigrant mothers with young children. Paid Parental leave together with job protection may increase labour force participation among women but if it is too generous it may create incentives to stay out of the labour force. This incentive effect may be especially true for mothers migrating to a country where having young children automatically makes the mothers eligible for the benefit. To evaluate the differences in the assimilation process for those who have access to the Parental leave benefit and those who do not, Swedish administration data are used in a difference-in-differences specification to control for both time in the country and the age of the youngest child. The results show that labour market entrance is delayed for immigrant mothers and that they are less likely to be a part of the labour force for up to seven years after their residence permit if they had access to Parental leave benefits when they came to Sweden. This reduction in the labor force participation is to some extent driven by unemployment since the effect on employment is smaller. However, labour force participation rates are still three percentage points lower 2–6 years after immigration.

**c. Ongoing research**

The overall objective of this project is to advance understanding of the link between Nordic family policy and demographic behaviour (i.e., continued childbearing and family stability) and life-course earnings. There are three sub-goals: (1) develop more comprehensive insight into the consequences of use of the parental leave policy for demographic behaviour and life-course earnings, examining the effect of individual take up of parental leave as well as the allocation between parents, (2) consider the effects of specific changes, or so-called ‘critical junctures’ in family policy, i.e., the introduction of the fathers’ quota within the parental leave policy and the introduction of the childcare cash benefit, (3) expand the analyses of the effects of family policy by examining the importance of regional variations and possible effects of cultural, structural and economic contexts.

This project studies in depth the process of organizational change—and resistance to change—in five Swedish-owned large private companies, with a predominant male workforce, selected to represent a range of support for fathers taking leave. Our main question is: What specific organizational processes facilitate and discourage fathers’ taking parental leave in particular company contexts? In each company, multiple stakeholders were interviewed: a top manager, the HR director, a middle manager supervising white collar workers and a middle manager supervising blue-collar fathers, and focus groups with fathers working under each middle manager. The project aims to investigate rationales for encouraging fathers to take leave, identify change agents, and reveal strategies used by advocates to bring about change. We also seek increased understanding of the resistance to accommodating fathers taking leave and insight into what aspects of traditional company culture clash most with accommodating fathers’ leave. Contact: Linda Haas at lhaas@iupui.edu.