



Recent developments in Icelandic leave policies

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Background information

■ Population (2003): **290.000**

■ **Women**

- Labour market activity rate 76%
- Working hours: 36
- Working hours (full time) 43

■ **Men**

- Labour market activity rate: 85%
- Working hours: 47
- Working hours (full time) 50



Women in Iceland

- A brief glimpse at the live of women in Iceland today
 - More children, longer working hours in paid work than women in the neighboring countries
 - Fertility rate (2003): 1.99
 - Relatively low political representation
 - Women MP's 30%
 - Women ministers 12% (3/12)
- The Icelandic sagas featured strong women
 - Strong and enduring women's movement



The leave system in Iceland

- Until recently, a complicated system with different rights for different groups
 - Women in public versus private sectors
 - Women versus men
 - Men's rights derived from women's rights
- Act on Maternity/Paternity Leave, Parental Leave and Child Care Leave (No. 95/2000)
 - 9 months paid leave in total + 13 weeks unpaid (x 2)
- 3 months non-transferable parental paternity leave, implemented in three steps from 2001 to 2003



Paternity leave - from reluctance to revolution

- Prior to 1998, very limited rights for men
- 1998 two weeks paternity leave granted to men - different conditions depending on employer
- The exclusion of men contested by the Complaints Committee on Equal Status in 1999; in 1998 the Supreme Court of Iceland ruled that it was a violation of the law and the Constitution
- The reluctance of the state was abruptly reversed by the legislation passed in 2000
 - Rationale: a quick-fix solution of gender inequalities in the labour market (i.e. wage inequality)



Parental leave schemes in Iceland

Mother <i>prior</i> to the birth	1 month (right, taken from the 3 months)
Mother <i>after</i> the birth	3 months
Father after the birth	3 months
Leave that the parents can share	3 months
Economic Compensation	80% of prior salary (min and max) if at least 25% job. Others flat rate benefit
Right to part-time/flexible leave	Yes
Can parents be on leave at the same time?	Yes
Total length of paid leave	9 months (to be used before the child is 18 months old)
Fathers' use of parental leave	Ca. 84%
Child care leave (unpaid)	13 weeks for each parent
Days used by mothers	182 (2003)
Days used by fathers	94 (2003)

“We are getting gender equality in this as in everything else – men fired because of parental leave”



- More and more men are fired illegally before they go on paternity leave, during the leave or soon after they return to their job. The The Commercial Workers' Union of Reykjavík gets bout 10-20 cases every year. Still it is more common that women are fired than men, but the number of men is increasing...
- From *Morgunbladid* [Iceland's biggest newspaper] 15/10 2004



Real fathers vs. real salaries

- Paternity (and maternity) leave only for those less fortunate?
 - The CEO of one of Iceland's biggest dairy producer was forced to resign after he announced to the board of the company that he and his wife were expecting twins. Benedikt Sigurðsson Chairman of the board, KEA [Iceland's second biggest dairy producer]
 - “The laws were first and foremost intended to ensure the rights of the general employee... The status of executives holding key posts and earning real salaries is a different matter”
- And for those having nothing more important to do
 - Iceland's state run broadcasting company ran a series on gender equality issues in the post days of the women's day. Paternity leave was discussed and prominent business people were interviewed. Ingólfur Helgason executive at Kb-bank [one of Iceland's biggest banks, big employee according to Icelandic standards, employing in Iceland and abroad] does not intend to take paternity leave
 - “...it surely would be fun to be on parental leave but...”



In a nutshell

- **A special measure**

Aimed at men, not children since children's rights are not secured if no father is "present"



The interplay between cultural norms and structural trends

Cultural norms	Gender sameness <i>(sharing)</i>		
	Gender difference <i>(division)</i>		Iceland
		<i>Universal Gender neutral</i>	<i>Specific Gender targeted</i>
		Structural trends	



Most recent and future developments

- **“Ceiling”**

In the year 2004 the laws were changed after some debate. Roof was put on payments, covering the salaries of those earning ISK 600.000 or more

- **Heteronormative**

Future developments: The minister of social affairs has announced that he is going to propose a new law making it possible for homosexual couples to primary adopt children that means that the law on maternity/paternity and parental leave has to be changed since the laws have primarily been aimed at heterosexual couples