

**Workshop Diversity and Leave Policies:  
28/29 November 2008, Amsterdam**

*Dimensions of diversity: Peter Moss  
Abstract*

This presentation provides an opportunity to draw together material from the previous presentations, so this abstract provides a starting point only. The focus is on whether and how the design of leave policies recognises different dimensions of diversity. At this stage I have identified seven dimensions, but there may well be more. I have included in each dimension one or more countries that have policies that exemplify recognition of this dimension – but this is not an exhaustive list:

1. *Gender: do leave policies recognise physiological or other differences between women and men with respect to childbearing, e.g. pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding. Are women accorded more leave than men on the basis of physiological differences, in particular a separate 'maternity leave' and 'breastfeeding' breaks (Most countries have separate maternity leave provision – but Iceland and Sweden are examples of countries that do NOT; Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain enable women to reduce their working hours in the 12 months after birth, usually related to breastfeeding.). A further issue is whether the design of some leave policies assumes innate gender difference with respect to childrearing, e.g. extended maternity leave or other leave for women only that implies women should assume primary responsibility for childcare (e.g. UK).*
2. *Health: do leave policies recognise differences in health (including disability), of children and/or parents, e.g. premature births or birth complications, acute or chronic health problems, disability (e.g. several countries offer extended maternity leave for premature births; leave to care for acutely ill children is widespread; Greece has a wide range of additional leave for parents of children with chronic illnesses or disabilities).*
3. *Household composition and relationships: do leave policies recognise diversity in parent/child relations, parental arrangements, household size, e.g. number of previous children, multiple births, lone parenting, same sex couples, adoptive parents (e.g. the 1983 EC proposal for a directive on parental leave included additional leave for lone parents – though this did not figure in the directive agreed in 1996; France and Germany offers longer maternity leave in the case of multiple births; Denmark extends Paternity leave to include same sex couples).*
4. *Employment: do leave policies recognise differences in employment history, status or circumstances, e.g. length of time employed, contractual status, working hours, self-employment, size of employer or workplace (e.g. parental leave eligibility in Canada – excluding Quebec – is 600 annual employment hours, but in Quebec it is \$2000 earnings; self-employed women are not eligible for maternity leave*

payment in Germany and are less advantaged in Belgium; self-employed women in the Netherlands were excluded from maternity leave payment in 2004, but have been re-instated from 2008).

5. *Income: do leave policies recognise differences in individual or household income, e.g. are payments flat rate or income-related? If income-related, is there a ceiling on payment and how high is the ceiling?*
6. *Preference: do leave policies recognise different preferences concerning the length of leave taking, the relationship between employment and care, and the sharing of care responsibilities between parents (e.g. Portugal, Quebec and Norway offer a trade off between length of leave and level of benefit payment; parental leave varies between countries from 3 months to nearly 3 years; a number of parental leave schemes (e.g. Belgium, France, Czech Republic, Sweden) enable parents to take leave part time for a period; leave schemes vary in how far they allow 'choice' to families in how the parents use leave and how far they include incentives for fathers to take leave).*
7. *Life course: do leave policies recognise diversity of care situations over the life course (either with respect to the upbringing of children or the care of adults) and/or the desire to take a period of leave from employment for other reasons (e.g. the time credit system in Belgium that enables workers to take leave for any reason, with extended payment made to workers taking time off to care for a seriously ill family member or handicapped child).*

Outlining these possible dimensions of leave raises a number of issues about how diversity can be accommodated in leave policies and, more fundamentally, how far diversity *should* be accommodated; diversity may further certain policy goals, while disrupting others. Some issues that occur to me initially include:

- Can the recognition of diversity in the design of leave policies enhance disadvantage, for example by adversely affecting gender equality or by increasing income inequalities or by rendering some workers ineligible for leave?
- What should be the respective roles of public and workplace policies in accommodating diversity? Can schemes become too complicated?
- How far can leave policies be designed to be of positive benefit to marginalised, insecure and otherwise disadvantaged workers and their families?

As a final thought, there is a lot of work to be done in better understanding the relationship between diversity, the use of leave policies, and the consequences of using leave policies. Where diversity is designed into leave policies, how far are these options used? Are these

options used more by some groups than others? What are the benefits and disadvantages of using these options – and for whom?