The Swiss parental leave scheme
Current situation and future developments

Isabel Valarino

Laboratory of Life Course Studies – Faculty of social and political science
1. Statutory parental leave policies

• Maternity leave
  – 98 days
  – 80% of earnings (ceiling EUR 63000)
  – Starts at delivery (not flexible)
  – Eligibility criteria

• Federal law on loss-of-income (2005)
  – 60 years of struggle
  – 4 leave schemes rejected in national vote
  – Agreement on a minimal scheme
• No statutory paternity leave
  – > minimum of 1 day-off (private law)

• No statutory parental and adoption leave

• Time off to care for dependent children
  – 3 days per illness event (paid)

• Time off to care for dependent elderly family members
  – 3 days per year (unpaid)
• Switzerland’s leave model:

« short leave part-time mother policy model »
(Wall, 2007)

- The leave is centered on the mother
- Modified male breadwinner model
- Care work is assigned to the family & labour market
- Gender equality is low on the political agenda
Total post-natal well-paid (>70% earnings) leave (months)

2. Special leave entitlements

- Cantonal entitlements: Geneva

- Civil servants of cantonal administrations
  - A majority of cantons grant extended maternity, paternity and parental leaves
  - A minority of cantons grant paid adoption leaves

- Private sector: a minority provides extended paternity and parental leaves
3. Recent political claims

- 1984: 9 months unpaid parental leave
  - > massively rejected in national vote (Aebi et al., 1994)

- Parliamentary interventions (N=27)

- Policy type:
  - parental leave and paternity leave are equally high on the agenda
  - Majority since 2006
  - Majority in favour of paid leaves for all wage workers
• Political actors:
  – various parties take interest (maj. Green)
  – Appropriation of the issue

• Arguments:
  – positive
  – negative
• Leave schemes (1999-2009):

- 3 proposals: 1 or 2 weeks of parental or paternity leave at 80 or 100% of salary
- 4 proposals: from 6 to 8 weeks of parental or paternity leave at 80% of salary
- 1 proposal -> 4 weeks of unpaid paternity leave

- A minority of the parliament supports leaves
- The federal council is opposed
- > leaves are NOT a political priority
4. Explanations for Switzerland’s limited leave scheme (Martin, 2002)

- European Union’s (lack of) influence

- Neo-institutional theories
  - Direct democracy
  - Federalist state
  - Political composition

- Role of representations
  - Representations of parenthood
  - Perceived benefits from parental leave schemes
5. Future developments

• No legislative change
  – > inequalities persist among employment sectors

• Possible legislative changes
  – Unpaid paternity/parental leave
  – > inequalities among social classes
  – Cantonal parental/paternity leave
  – > inequalities among regions
Thank you for your attention

contact : isabel.valarino@unil.ch
References


