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Fathers as Mothers' Assistants: Father Involvement in Slovenia

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Introduction

- A dual earner gender regime (full-time employment, individual income taxation).
- In recent decades, changes in fathering and fatherhood are occurring on both the structural (policy) and individual (behaviour) level.
 - Structural level: developments in family and gender-equality policy, such as paternity leave provisions, promote active fatherhood.
 - Individual level: increased participation of fathers in childcare compared to previous generations of fathers (Rener et al, 2008; Humer, 2009).

Statutory provisions for fathers (1)

- It was possible to transfer the mother's right to parental leave to the father as early as 1975 (Sweden was the first in 1974).
- Now an **individual entitlement to 130 days of parental leave** (transferrable to the mother).
- Paid **paternity leave** since 2003. In 2017, 25 paid days and 25 days compensated with social security contributions (based on the minimum wage) paid from the state budget.
- **From 2018** there will be only **30 paid days** altogether.
- The **first 15 days** of paid leave may be taken full-time or part-time (also as individual working days, 70%) **during the child's first six months; the rest** may be taken as full-time or part-time leave **until the child completes the first grade of primary school** (around 7 years of age).
- Full income compensation (temporarily 90% for those earning more than the minimum wage) while on parental or paternity leave.
- Ceiling: 2.5 times the average wage in Slovenia (temporarily 2 times).

Statutory provisions for fathers (2)

- Generous **leave to take care of a sick child**:
 - 7 working days for each episode of illness (per family); 15 working days for a child of up to seven years of age or a disabled child; exceptionally, to up to six months. Paid at 80 per cent of the individual's average earnings in the preceding calendar year, with a minimum at approximately €238 per month.
- An option to **work part time** and have the social security contributions for the hours not worked paid if taking care of a child below the age of three years, two children, of which one has not completed the first grade of primary school (around 7 years of age), or a disabled child.

Impact of policies encouraging fathers to take the leave (1)

- May have helped support an increase in active fathers.
- Although **the pace of change** has been (very) **slow**, some aspects of fatherhood have been changing in both quantitative and qualitative terms.
- Roughly four in five fathers take up to (and close to) 15 days of paternity leave (a maximum with full income compensation up to 2015). In fact more, since not all fathers are eligible.
- Less than one in five leave-takers take more than 15 days. Prevailing reason (before 2016): earnings not (fully) compensated.
- The share of fathers taking some of the parental leave: around 5 per cent in the mid-2000s; 6-7 per cent in 2012-2016. (Paternity leave was introduced in 2003!).
- Fathers accounted for only 14% of all parents absent from work due to childcare responsibilities in 1997; 16% in 2007 (Rener et al, 2008).

Impact of policies encouraging fathers to take the leave (2)

- 2012 survey: A leave to care for the sick youngest child below the age of 18 years is taken mostly by the father/male partner 16 times less frequently (in 3.0 % families) than by the mother.
- In roughly one third of families (29.3 %) the parents/partners share this task (Robnik, 2012, p. 52).
- Part-time work due to care of children with disabilities and small children: both the absolute number and the proportion of fathers among the beneficiaries have been continuously increasing. In 2015, fathers accounted for about a fifth of all beneficiaries.

Obstacles to fathers' higher uptake of leaves

- Mothers' wish to be with the child for the whole duration of leave.
- Lack of women's trust in the men's ability to care for babies and infants.
- It is harder for men than for women to deviate from their traditional gender role in the family.
- Surprisingly, in the 2010 survey, as many as 22% of the respondents aged 20–49 who had children did not know that the parental leave could be shared between the parents (Rakar et al, 2010).
- Men's perception of themselves being non-replaceable employees but replaceable parents (particularly widespread among managers).
- Employers are not in favour of fathers taking leave. It is easier to organise a replacement for an employee who is absent for a year than for the one who is absent for one to several months.
- Businesses got used to mothers' long absence after childbirth and uptake of the leave to care for sick children; they (not even female bosses and colleagues) do not expect fathers to be absent for these reasons. This has not yet become a part of their risk management strategies.

Fathers' behaviour

- A mismatch between fathers' egalitarian attitudes and their traditional behaviour in daily practice.
- A considerable gap between fathers' subjective perception of their fathering activities and the everyday reality of their contribution to childcare.
- Fathers prefer to play a supportive role in daily childcare tasks and responsibilities, which translates into less care work and responsibility.
- One third of fathers surveyed had to deal with workplace obligations while they were on paternity leave (Rener et al, 2005).
- The division of care work in the family continues to be gendered and asymmetrical.

Fathers' engagement in childcare (1)

- Fathers are less likely than mothers to be either first or second main performers of childcare activities (Stropnik and Černič Istenič, 2001; Rakar et al, 2010).
- Men's participation in early child care appears to be optional and they can choose which work they want to do.
- Fathers typically use the paternity leave after the mother returns from hospital. They mainly support mothers, care for and play with older children, do the shopping; they also care for and feed the newborn child (Rener et al, 2005).
- Most frequently fathers cradle and comfort the newborn, change nappies and clothing for the baby, and bath and wash the baby. Least frequently they get up at night because of the child.
- Men engage in more pleasant, less routine and more time-flexible childcare activities (conversation, reading, listening, playing and educational activities); more involved with somewhat older children. Routine infant care remains mothers' work.

Fathers' engagement in childcare (2)

- Fathers are more able than mothers to negotiate the timing of their involvement, such as spending more time with their children on weekends („weekend fathers“).
- They are more likely than mothers to plan and organise the childcare tasks, even when both parents share the care work relatively evenly (Švab and Humer, 2013).
- All this enables men to more readily reconcile their childcare responsibilities with their professional lives than women (Humer, 2009).

The Slovenian fatherhood regime

Two dominant models of fatherhood in Slovenia:

1. the complementary model: fathers only rarely participate in childcare and other family work and they mainly perform traditionally male tasks; among childcare tasks, they usually engage in playing with children; and
2. the supportive model (becoming more popular): fathers' participation in both childcare and household work is perceived as a support/help function to their female partners.

The new fatherhood is mainly characterised by fathers' increased emotional involvement and participation in care activities, which go beyond the provision of material and financial support to the family, rather than an increased participation in other household work.

For individual fathers, changes in the direction of new fatherhood are mostly evident at the symbolic level: in men's desire to be involved with their children and in the increasing value attached to fathers' caring role.