

Equal rights of both parents to paid parental leave in Iceland: The 2021 policy and leave use after the revision

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- The law from 2000 and the take up
- Extension to 12 months
- Has take up increased after the recent revision of the law?

The Act on maternity/paternity and parental leave from 2000

The aim of the act is “...to ensure children’s care from both parents and to enable both women and men to co-ordinate family life and work outside the home”

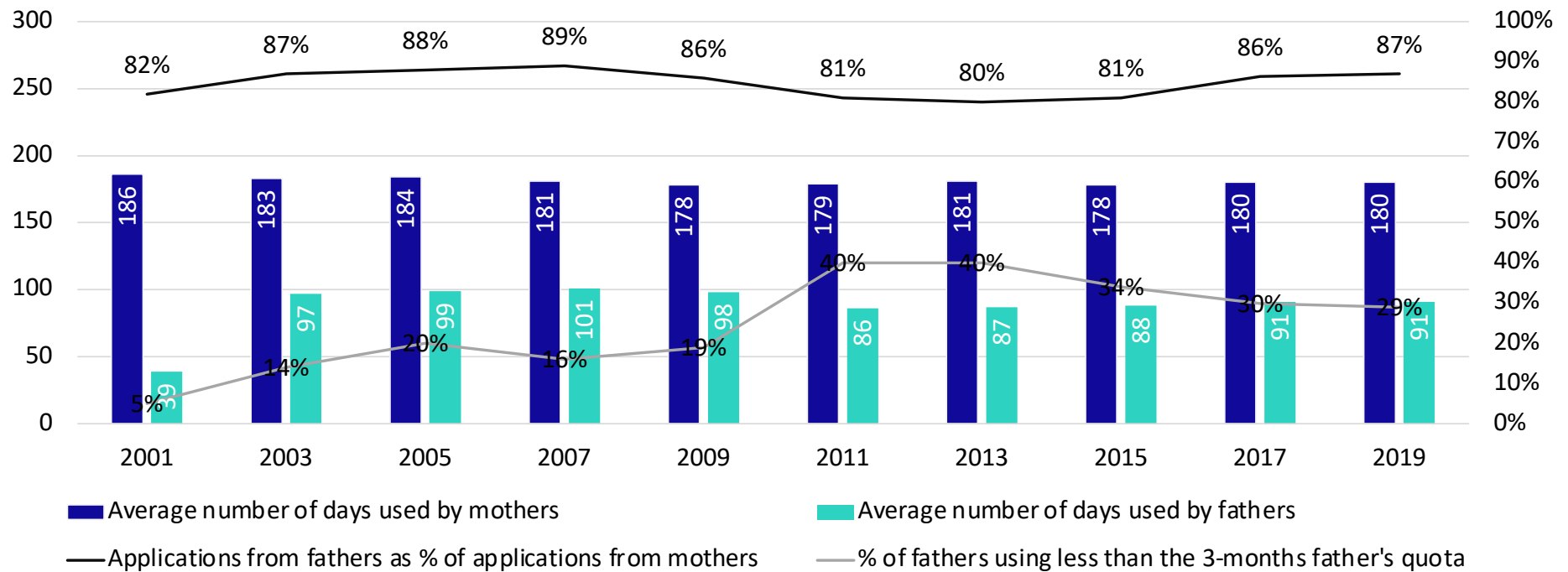
- Financed by insurance levy from employers
- From 2000-2004 **no income ceiling**
- 2004 relatively high ceiling implemented



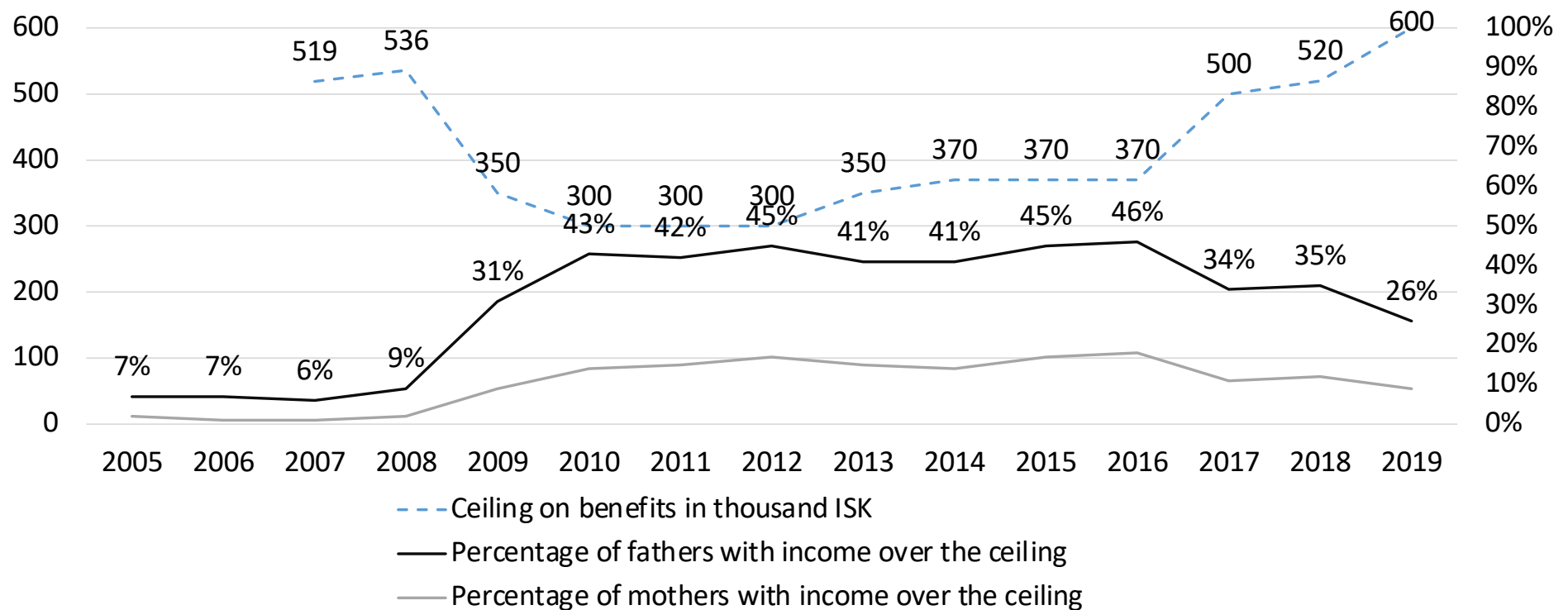
All parents included and high flexibility

- Mother has to take leave first two weeks after birth, but leave can otherwise be used **as parents like** during the 2 years after birth + they can take leave simultaneously
- Both parents are entitled to paid leave **regardless of custody/family form/gender/residency etc.** but the custodial parent has to give consent for the access to the child
- Only in cases of **one (solo) parent** the parent is given the **right to all 9 months** (and in exceptions like if the other parent in prison, in hospital etc.)
- Financed the birth leave fund that is financed by an insurance levy from employers

High take-up – Statistics from the Parental Leave Fund



Ceiling on benefits



Lessons learned =>

Given that the ceiling is high enough, fathers use their quota and the equal quota rights enables care from both parents



- In 2018 the coalition government of the Left-Green Movement, the Independence Party (right of the centre) and the Progressive Party put the extension of the leave to 12 months on the agenda in its discussions with the social partners



Katrín Jakobsdóttir Prime-Minister

How to divide the 12 months?

- A committee appointed by the government suggested in autumn 2018 bill an extension to 12 months with a **5+5+2** division, to be implemented in steps
- When the bill was presented by Einarsson, Minister of children and social affairs it was met with some hesitation in the parliament *Althingi* and the welfare committee instead suggested a **4+4+4** division



Result: 12 months in two steps!



- The end result in 2019 became that the leave was extended from **9 to 10 months**, with one month added to each parents' quota and the sharable months reduced to 2 (a **4+4+2 division**)
- + That in 2020 a committee, appointed by the minister of social affairs would revise the law and suggest how to divide the 12 months between parents: The committee suggested a **5+5+2 division**
- Similar discussions as in 2019 but this time the debate was more intense both in *Althingi* and in society

Debated in the governmental portal

unsually many remarks, 232 from individuals and 18 from experts



- “Placing such a strain on how to use the leave will result in mothers stretching the leave [by using it part-time] which means that mothers will receive lower benefits while using leave, as fathers will not make full use of their rights”
- “A child should be breastfed until its 12 months, and pumping breast milk is difficult and time-consuming. Will mothers receive an extra grant to purchase breast pumps?”
- “I think that shortening the shared period to one month is a step backwards which will hurt the children of single mothers”

Arguments against

- The right of the family to choose how to divide the leave
- Worries that children of lone parents would not receive as long parental care as children sharing a home with two parents
- The emphasis on attachment theories was mainly put forward by an interest organization on mental health, which emphasised full freedom for parents to divide all 12 months as they choose, and that 12 months of leave was not long enough- should be 2 years
- This perspective was also adopted by a populist party in *Althingi*
- Importance of breastfeeding: Very few published research on breastfeeding in Iceland exist and therefore, the discussion on breastfeeding was mainly based on recommendations from WHO and individual experiences posted on social media and elsewhere + ref. to US research!

Support from social partners – but the governmental parties not united



- The unions and the organization of employers supported the 5+5+2 division
- MPs from the Independence Party, right of the centre, in the welfare committee in *Althingi* spoke against 5+5+2 and suggested a 4+4+4 solution, thus the governmental parties were not in full agreement on the bill
- A small populist party spoke against all quotas
- The **end result** was a bill proposing to lengthen the leave to 12 months, providing each parent with **an individual right of 6 months, but each parent could transfer 1.5 month to the other parent (thus, a 4.5+4.5+3 system)**

The change from 9 to 12 months

	First parent	Second parent	Joint rights to be used as the parents wished	Transferable rights
Law in 2000	3	3	3	
Changes in 2020	4	4	2	
Final result in 2021	6	6	-	1.5 month each parent

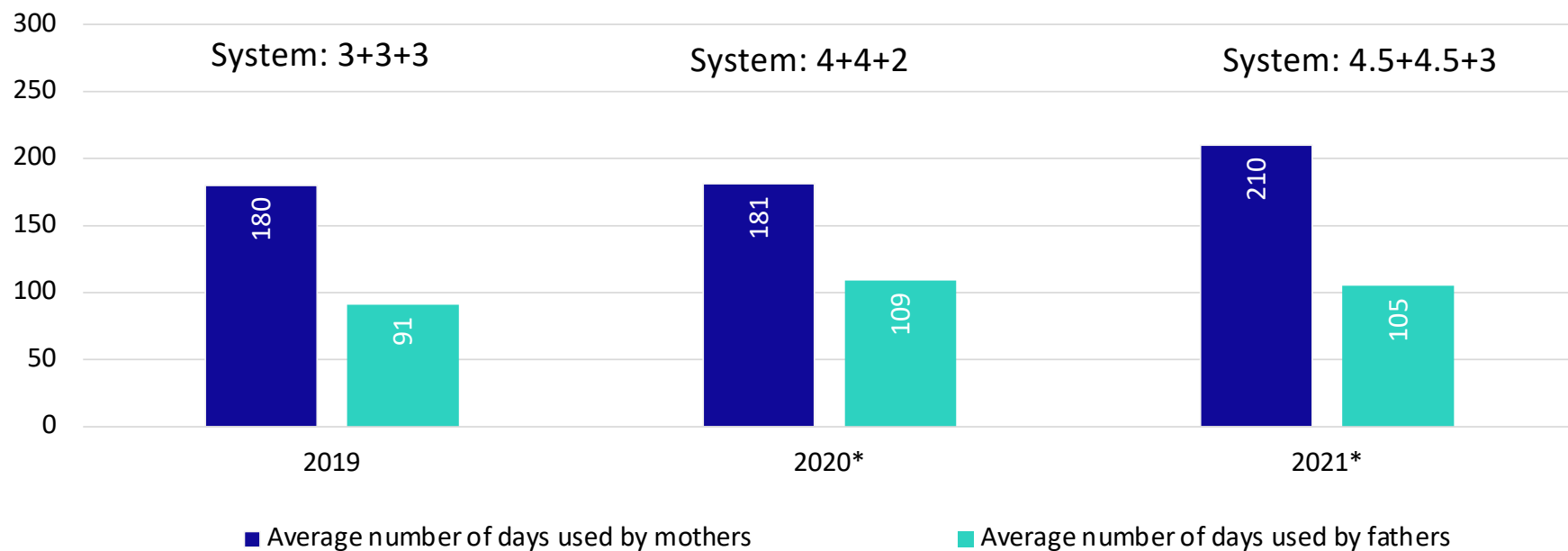
Accepted by all votes!



- Despite proposals about no quota from the populist party all 61 MP's accepted the bill, but 2 were absent
- Thus in the end a political consensus was reached regarding the importance of the non-transferable quota rights of both parents as the way to ensure that the twofold goals of the law is reached

The take up after the new law?

Leave use, before and after the lengthening of the mother's and father's quota



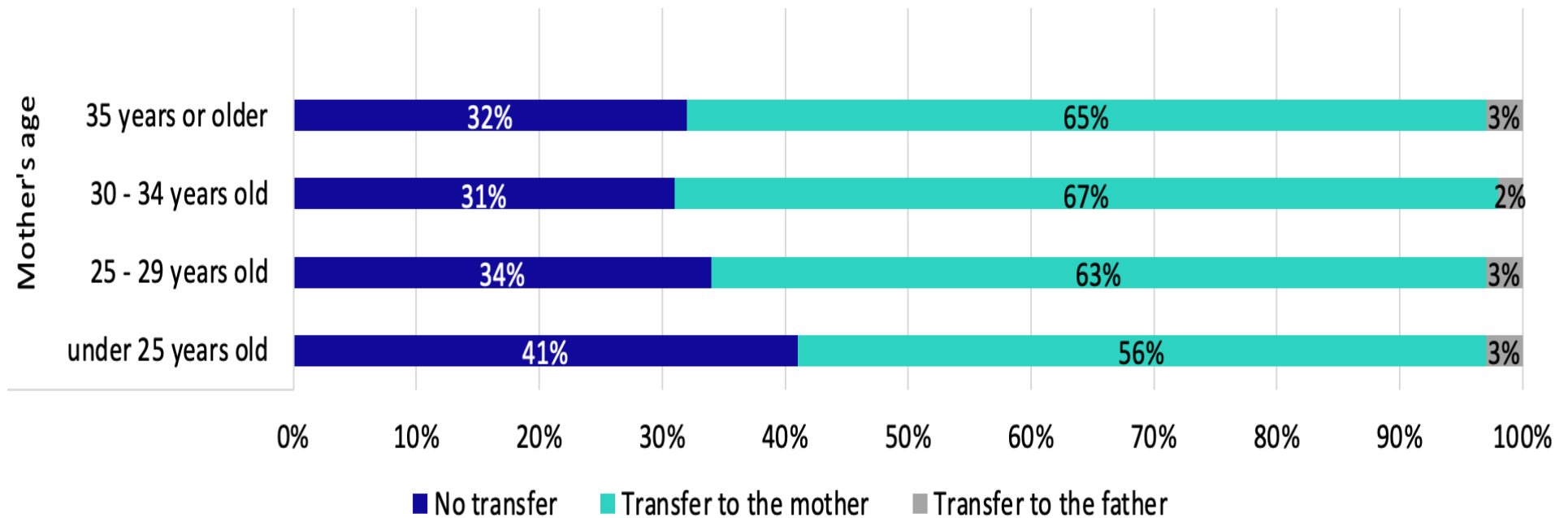
*Numbers for 2020 and 2021 are preliminary

Transfer of individual rights in 2021

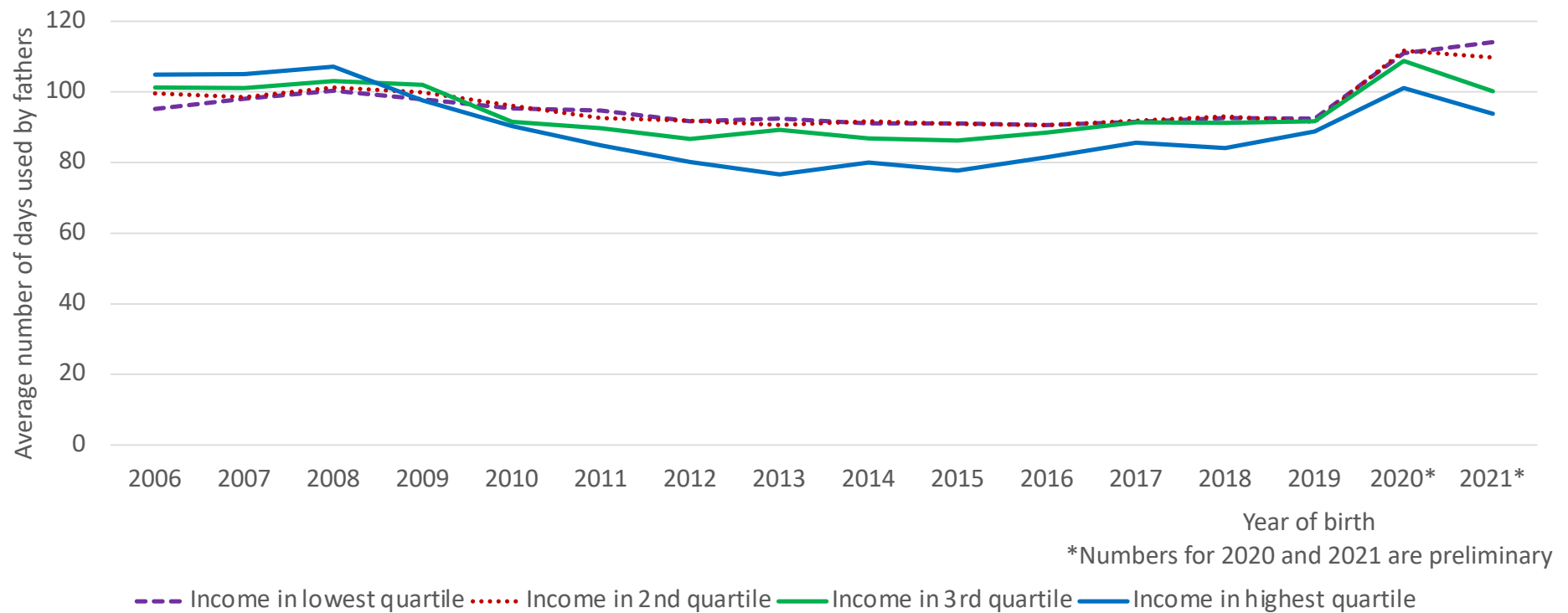
	% of those who applied for payments from the fund	% of those that transfer their rights
Transfer from mother to father	3%	4%
Transfer from father to mother	62%	96%
Transfer in total	65%	

=> The fact that **35% of parents do not transfer** their individual rights, indicates that the change in wording from “sharable” to “transferable” months encourages fathers to take longer leaves

Transfer of individual rights by parents' age



Fathers' leave use by income



Conclusion

- Since 2000 over 80% of fathers have taken leave and on average they have used the full number of their quota days
- Mothers have used their quota + the period of leave that parents can divide as they wish
- Despite the debates on the length of the quota a wide political consensus on the importance of the equal non-transferable rights
- Preliminary statistics on leave use after the recent reform reveal that fathers use their quota, but transfer most of the 1.5 months to the mothers



Thank you