

# What Do We Compare When We Compare Fathers' Leave Take-up? A Conceptual Review

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21<sup>st</sup> International Network on Leave Policies & Research Annual Seminar

18 June 2024

# Setting the scene

- Fathers' leave-taking as a dynamic policy field
  - Both at the supranational level:
    - Council Directives 96/34/EC, 2010/EU/18 and 2019/1158
    - resulting in a “convergence on paternity leave, but divergence on earmarked parental leave” (de la Porte et al., 2023, p. 550).
  - and at the country level, e.g.
    - Germany, 2007 +2 months when fathers take leave
    - Portugal, 2009, from paternity leave to father-only-leave
    - Luxembourg, 2016 use-it-or-lose it, 6 months parental leave
    - Iceland, 2020 four months of parental leave for each parent
    - Spain, 2021 16-week paid parental leave for fathers

# Growing scholarly interest and ever-expanding knowledge base, yet inconsistent, varying findings

- Results from studies on the causal impact of fathers' leave reforms on childbearing behaviours diverge between
  - a lack of impact in Norway (Cools et al., 2015; Duvander et al. 2020; Hart et al., 2019)
  - and a positive impact, though limited and temporary, in Sweden (Duvander et al., 2020),
  - and a negative impact in Spain (Farré and González, 2019).
- On fathers' contribution to a more gender-equal division of housework or mothers' faster return to paid work, studies finding
  - No impact in Austria (Kleven et al., 2024, forthcoming)
  - Positive and lasting impact in Germany (Tamm, 2019)

# Research Questions

i) What are we measuring when we measure fathers' leave take-up?

ii) what are we comparing when we compare fathers' leave take-up?

- Heterogeneities in terminology
- Heterogeneities in policy design
- Heterogeneities driven by data sources

# Data and methods

International Review of Leave  
Policies and Research 2023

OECD Family Database

Review of the literature

father\*, paternity leave, parental leave, paid parental leave, parental  
leave policy (2,000 + articles)

Restriction to Sociology, Family Studies, Social Sciences,  
Demography

577 articles on WoS + 85 on Scopus

Excluding policy debates, review articles, non-European coverage,  
qualitative, mothers-only focus, non-father focus, non-English, other  
thematically irrelevant ones and duplicates

62 articles

# Heterogeneities in Terminology

# Leave for fathers

- Parental leave, parenting leave, childcare leave, fathers' leave, paternity leave, daddy months, and so on
- A varied lexicon: terms are often mixed in comparative studies
  - Contextual differences
  - Lost in translation?
  - Introduction of gender-neutral terminology
- For example, Arnalds et al. (2021) comparing between Spain's 13-day-long paternity leave and Iceland's 3 months of father-only birth leave
- Marynissen et al. (2019) comparing between Sweden's daddy months and Belgium's 10-day paternity leave
  - Are we referring to the same leave?

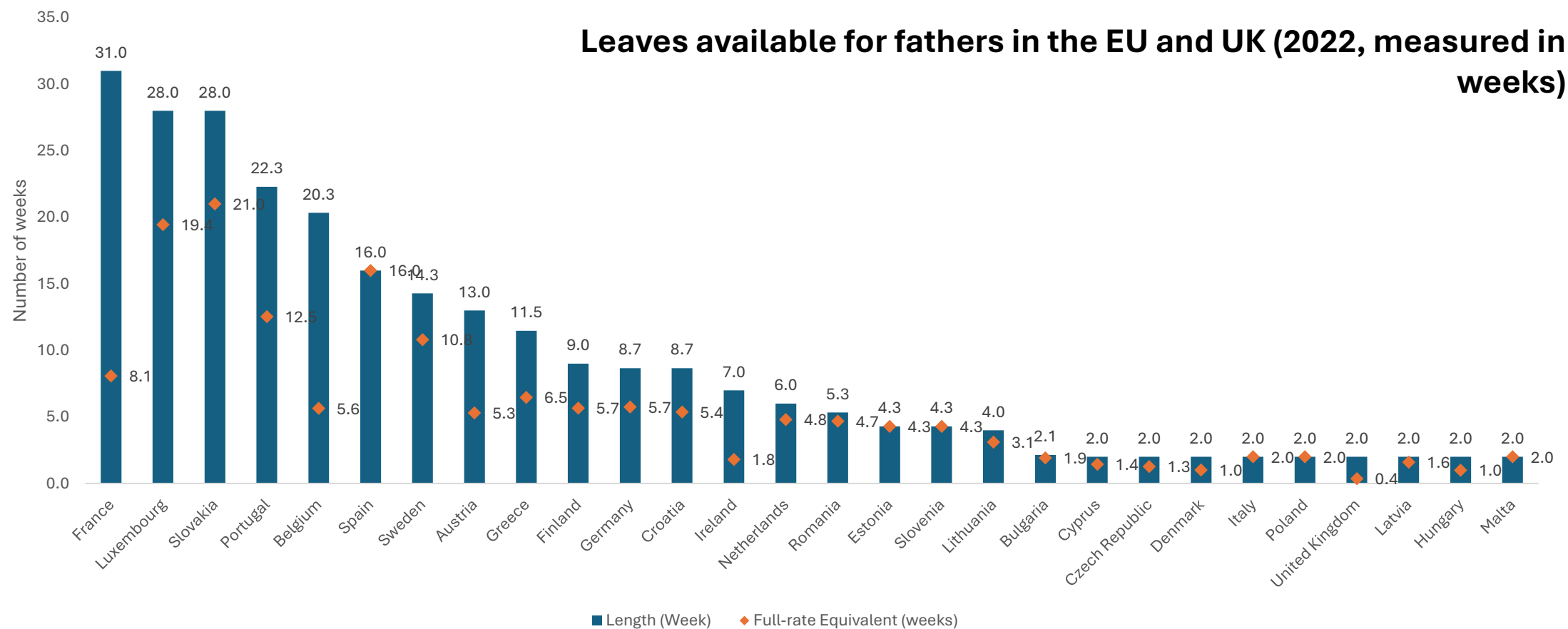
# Heterogeneities in Policy Design



## One fourth of the member states offer father-only leave incentives in the EU

Country	Father-specific leave incentives
Austria	One month of paternity leave to be taken within three months after childbirth. Compensated with an additional family-time bonus (familienzeitbonus) of €23.91 per calendar year
Germany	Two exclusive months of parental leave benefits are allocated to fathers.
Italy	If fathers take at least three months of leave the total parental leave benefit period allocated to the family increases from 9 to 11 months.
Luxembourg	One of the parents is required to take parental leave immediately after the end of maternity leave so that the other parent can gain access to parental leave. The first leave is often taken by the mothers, and with that, fathers gain access to a flexible parental leave to be taken before the child turns age of six.
Portugal	Five additional days of paternity leave if fathers attend an infant care course. If there is only one parent using parental leave, the length of parental leave is 22 months. If both parents take the leave (for the majority of the cases this means if fathers take at least two months of leave) then the total leave that family can get is 24 months.
Sweden	90 of 240 days of parental leave is allocated to fathers

Substantial variation exists not only in the length but also in the remuneration level: generosity in leave length is not equivalent to generosity in remuneration.



Source: OECD Family Database 2024, based on 2022 policies.

# Concerns and proposed solutions

- Issues related to eligibility criteria and comparability (Dobrotić & Blum, 2020; Doucet & McKay, 2020; Duvander & Koslowski, 2023; Kurowska, 2021)
- Indices accounting for the multidimensionality of fathers' leave
  - Effective parental leave indicator of Saraceno and Keck (2010); Bünning and Pollman-Schult (2015)
    - They construct a comparative parental leave indicator by calculating a score based on the length of father-only leave and payment level.
  - Bártová and Emery (2016)
    - They calculate an average weekly benefit based on a ratio of total leave benefits to total leave duration and then calculate a compensation rate based on a ratio of average weekly benefit to average weekly income using maternity leave as the case example
  - Kurowska (2021)
    - Proposed an adjusted quantitative measure to score the inclusiveness of leave policies
  - Engeman and Burman (2022)
    - “new, longitudinal and cross-national comparative indicators for each type of fathers' leave provision” (p. 635).

# Heterogeneities Driven by Data Sources

# There is a limit to your data and your analysis

## Administrative data

- High precision, but not always have the granular leave data
  - 31 of the 62 articles in this review used admin data: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, Norway, and Sweden

## Nationally representative (often, longitudinal) survey data

- Belgium: Wood et al. (2023), “a register-based panel constructed from the Datawarehouse of the Crossroads Bank for Social Security” (p. 93);
- Germany: Bünning (2015); Schober and Zoch (2018), Socio-economic Panel (DIW or SOEP)
- France: Barry et al. (2023), the French Longitudinal Study of Children (ELFE)
- Norway: Kotsadam and Finseraas (2013) Young in Norway panel data; Kotsadam and Finseraas (2011) Life cOurse, Generation and Gender (LOGG) study
- Sweden: Duvander (2014); Evertsson et al. (2018) and Almqvist and Duvander (2014), the Swedish Young Adult Panel Study (YAPS)
- Spain: Escot et al. (2013), Spanish Economically Active Population Survey; Moreno-Mínguez et al. (2023); Moreno-Mínguez et al. (2022); Jurado-Guerrero and Muñoz-Comet (2020) the Spanish Labour Force Survey; Meil et al. (2023) and Romero-Balsas et al. (2022), the Spanish Fertility Survey.

## Standalone survey data

- Finland: Eerola et al. (2019) and Eerola et al. (2022), the Finnish Childcare Policies: In/equality in Focus (2015-2021) project;
- Germany: Gerst and Grund (2022) survey on middle managers working in the chemical industry in Germany.
- Iceland and Spain comparison Arnalds et al. (2021) and Arnalds et al. (2019).
- Spain: Castellanos-Serrano et al. (2023) the Survey of the Use of Parental Leave and Its Labour Consequences (Encuesta sobre el uso de los permisos parentales y sus consecuencias laborales 2012)

# Final words

- Policy developments feed intellectual curiosity
- Countries with high-quality data, especially when coupled with innovative policies, hold the power to lead and shape the knowledge and evidence base
- Surprisingly not many comparative studies out there (perhaps there is a reason?)
- More granularity in the data, especially in harmonised comparative surveys, is needed
- Embrace diversity & acknowledge flaws in the data
- Contextualisation matters
- Follow a common terminology? >> Iceland's birth leave or Spain's birth and childcare leave