

Attitudes towards family leave sharing between mothers and fathers in Europe – comparison of 21 countries

Minna Ylikännö, Ph.D., Senior Researcher, Kela

Mia Hakovirta, Ph.D., Academy Research Fellow, University of Turku

Milla Salin, Ph.D., University Lecturer, University of Turku



Background of the study

- In many European countries, falling fertility rates have raised an emerging question of reforming family policies in order to better facilitate the reconciliation of family and work.
- In order to maintain decent fertility rates, families with children or with an intention to have children have to be provided with benefits and services that enable parents to participate both in paid and unpaid work.
- Traditional views on the parental roles in the families with children may however hinder necessary policy reforms
- Traditionally, mothers are seen primary caregivers and respectively fathers are expected to provide for the family
- Although these traditional attitudes have loosened their strength in the last decades, we can still observe a significant difference between mothers and fathers in the time allocated to paid and unpaid work including childcare

- Traditional views on the gender role may hinder necessary family policy reforms, but on the other hand attitudes can be shaped by implementing progressive policy reforms
- Sweden, coherently introducing gender equality in all policy areas including family policy programs since the 1970s, is a good example of this
- Germany introduced a radical family policy reform in 2007 including two months daddy leave. This resulted a significant increase in the uptake of parental leave by fathers
- The reform was implemented in a relatively conservative environment, against all odds - working mothers are sometimes referred to as "Rabenmutter". This dissimive term reflects the family oriented cultural values emphasizing the women's role as primary caregivers
- Policy makers are prone to promote policies agreeable to their voters - if the attitudes of majority of (potential) voters are rather traditional than progressive, it may not be easy to implement policies aiming to increase gender equality within both private and public spheres of life
- **The EU's ambitious goal of increasing employment rate to 75 per cent by the year 2020 is difficult without implementing new policies promoting the reconciliation of family and work.**

Research agenda

- In our study, we ask, *how are the attitudes of women and men living in 21 European countries towards the division of families lives between mothers and fathers in the families with small children and whether we can form specific cluster representing different attitudinal environments.*
 - Typically, the actual policies are scrutinized in order to evaluate the degree of gender equality of the societies – changes in public opinion equally important as they tend to precede policy changes and vice versa
- In the analysis, we utilize International Social Survey Project (ISSP) from year 2012 with the theme “Family, work ja gender roles”
- When interpreting the results, we utilize the country breakdown by Thévenon (2011) and Szelewa and Polakowski (2008)
 - In the former breakdown, countries are grouped based on their family policies and more specifically on the concepts of decommodification and defamiliarization, i.e. to what extent citizens are independent of the functioning of the market, and to what extent care responsibilities have been transferred from families to the public sector.
 - In the latter breakdown, the post-communist countries are divided into four groups based on their family policy models

Thévenon 2011	Nordic countries	Central European countries	Anglo saxon countries and Switzerland	Southern European countries	Eastern European countries
	Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland	Germany, France, Austria	Great Britain, Ireland, Switzerland	Spain	Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia
					Kroatia, Bulgaria, Russia ^a
Szelewa ja Polakowski 2008	Explicit family policy model	Implicit family policy model	Female mobilizing model	Comprehensive model	
	Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia	Poland	Latvia	Lithuania	

Data

- In the ISSP 2012 questionnaire, respondents are asked how family leave should be shared between the mother and the father when a small child is in the family.
- This question (Q10) has been asked from all respondents who have responded "yes" to the (Q8) question, should the parents in general have the option for paid leave when there are small children in the family.
- 7,1 per cent of the respondents think that parents should not be offered paid family leave after the birth of a child. These respondents have been excluded from the final data.
- The final data contains answers from 28,839 respondents from 21 European countries
- Data is analysed with descriptive methods and with cluster analysis

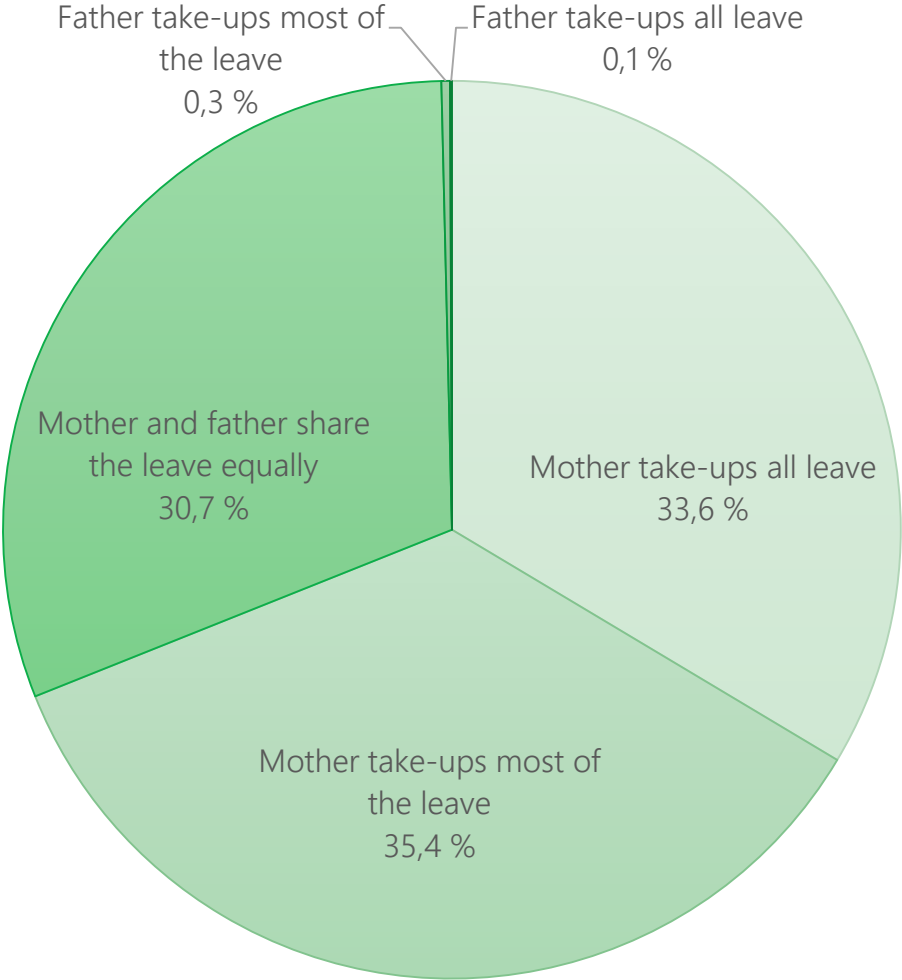
All	n = 28 409
Women	52,1 %
Men	47,9 %
	-
Age (mean)	48,5
	-
Years of schooling (mean)	12,5
	-
In employment	56,4 %
Pensioners	21,1 %
Unemployed	6,4 %
Taking care of own household	3,9 %
Other	12,2 %
	-
Households with children under school age	14,2 %
	-
Married or registered partnership	56,8 %
Non-married	25,7 %
Divorced	9,8 %
Widowed	7,8 %
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Lives in the city or in urban neighbourhood	66,6 %

The dependent variable

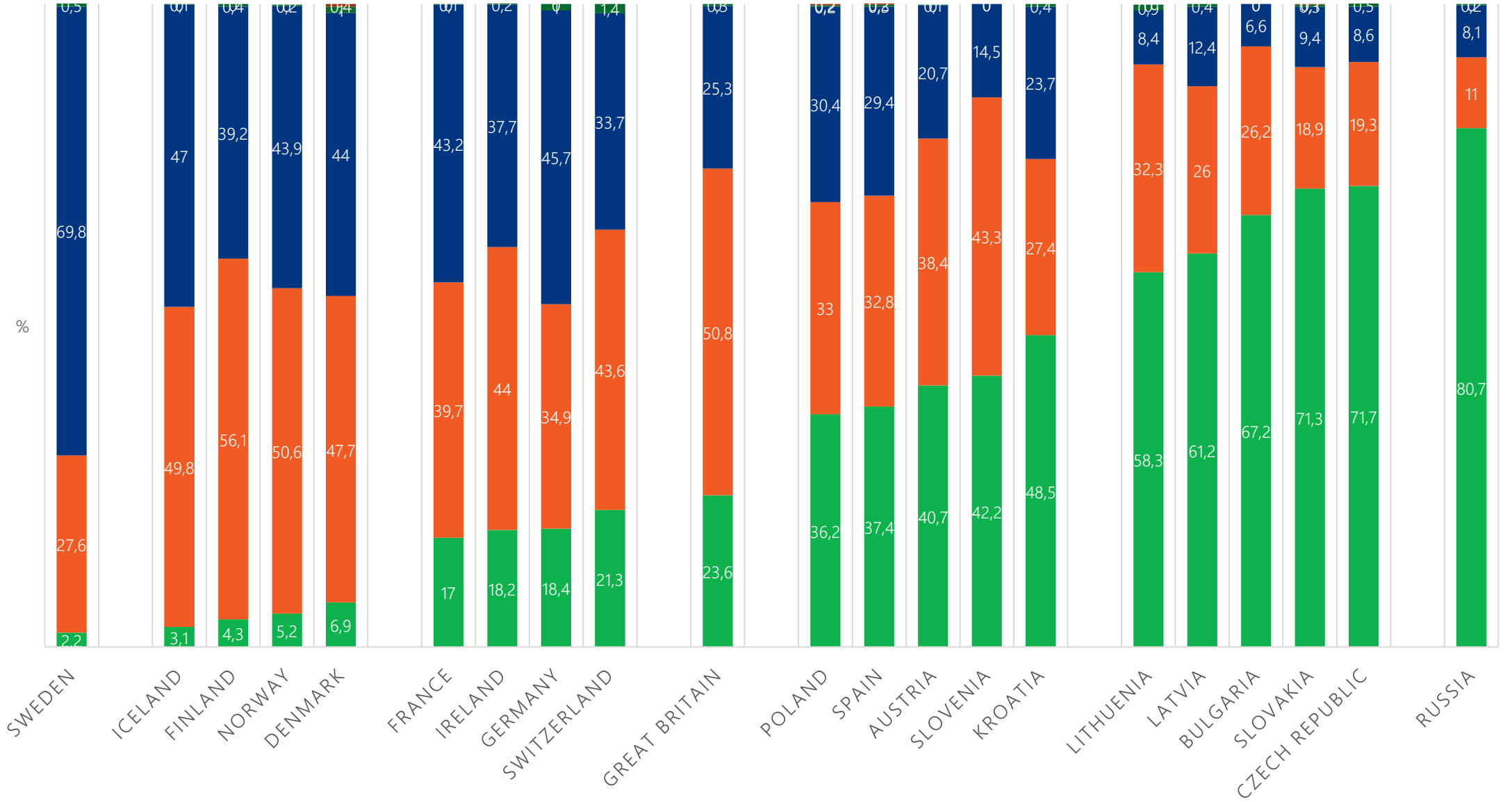
- Question (Q10) is formatted as follows: "Still thinking about the same couple (Q8: Consider a couple who both work full-time and now have a new born child. One of them stops working for some time to care for their child), if both are in a similar work situation and are eligible for paid leave, how should this paid leave period be divided between the mother and the father?"
- For respondents, there were five options for responding:
 - 1) The mother should take the entire paid leave period and the father should not take any paid leave,
 - 2) The mother should take most of the paid leave period and the father should take some of it,
 - 3) The mother and the father should each take half of the paid leave period,
 - 4) The father should take most of the paid leave period and the mother should take some of it,
 - 5) The father should take the entire paid leave period and the mother should not take any paid leave.

Results

Attitudes towards sharing the family leave between mothers and fathers in 21 European countries in 2012 (Source: ISSP 2012)

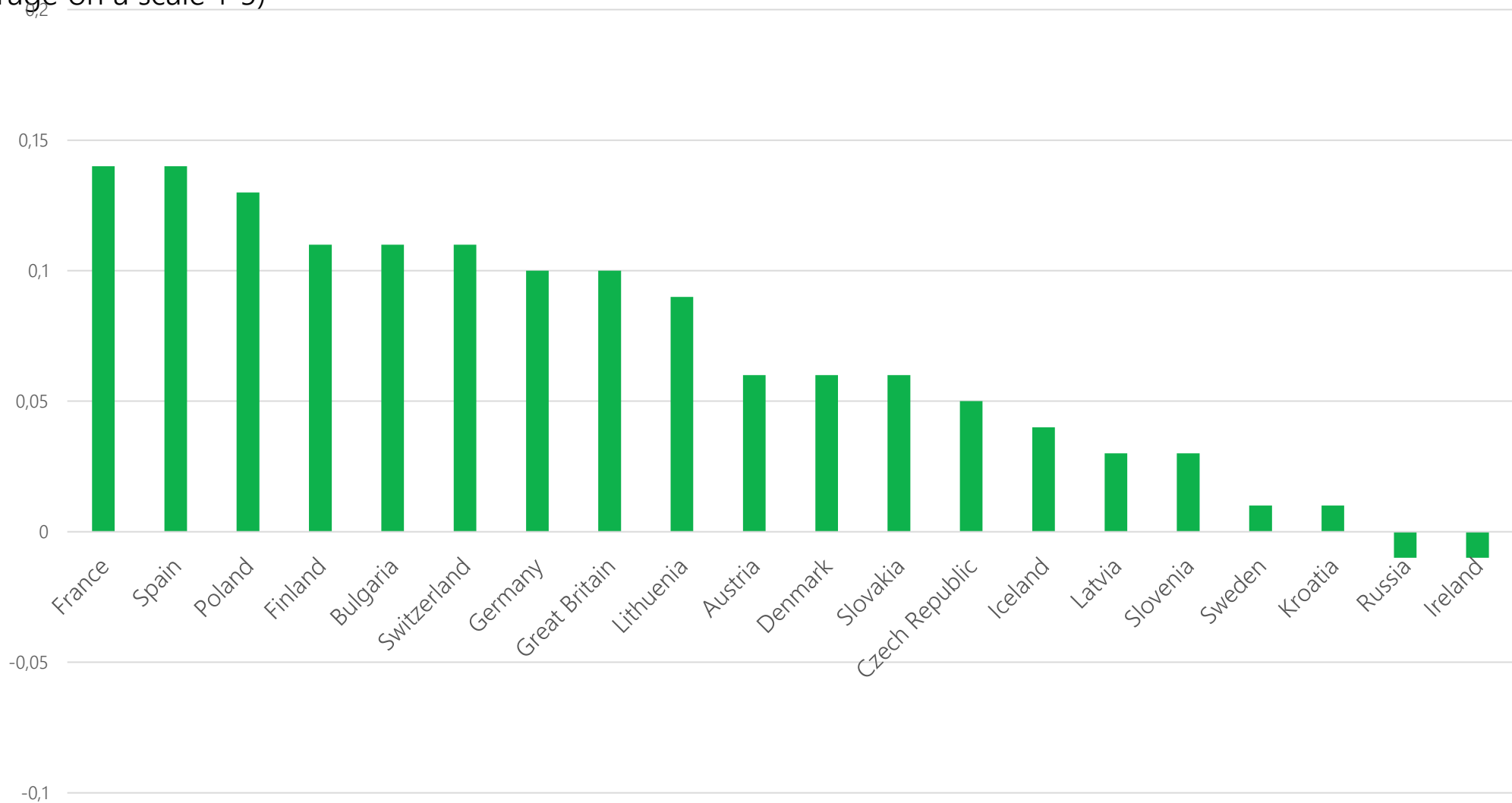


■ Mother/whole leave
 ■ Mother/most leave
 ■ Shared leave
 ■ Father/most leave
 ■ Father /whole leave



- Arpino et al. (2015): The smaller the gender difference in the attitudes the greater the pressure for change

The gender difference in the attitudes towards sharing family leave by country (male average – female average on a scale 1-5)



Summary and conclusions

- Countries cluster in a similar way in our analysis on attitudes as in the earlier research on family policies
- However, we find rather a continuum than distinct country groups (regimes)
- On the one end of the continuum is Sweden with most egalitarian attitudes and on the other end Russia with least egalitarian attitudes
- Sweden differs from other Nordic countries in the public attitudes – and also in the actual policies with long history of emphasizing gender equality in all policy making
- Both in Sweden and in Russia the gender gap in the attitudes is small
 - In Sweden, majority of women and men think that parents should share the parental leave equally
 - In Russia, almost all women and men think that mothers should take-up the whole parental leave
- In the countries with large or quite large gender gap in the attitudes the parent with more egalitarian attitudes may be prone to adjust her/his behaviour according to expectations of the less egalitarian parent.
 - E.g. in Finland, fathers take-up rates for paternity leave (appr. 3 weeks) are high, but mothers take-up most of the leaves when measured in days
- **Coercive legislation needed in order to change the attitudes?**

Thank you! Kiitos! Kösnözöm!

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