

This briefing note was presented at The Australia Institute Nordic Policy Centre Roundtable on Paid Parental Leave, 26 August 2019.

BRIEFING NOTE |

The fathers' quota in Iceland for 19 years: Impact on work and care

Ásdís Aðalbjörg Arnalds, University of Iceland

In cooperation with Professor Guðný Björk Eydal and Associate Professor Ingólfur V. Gíslason

Childcare policies and the Nordic welfare model

- Comprehensive childcare policies are one of the main characteristics of the Nordic welfare model
- Generous paid parental leave schemes, along with early childhood education and care (ECEC), contribute to the development of the dual earner/dual carer model in the Nordic countries (e.g. Eydal & Rostgaard, 2013)

Main goals of the Nordic childcare policies

- to promote children's well-being
- to ensure gender equality and increased female labour force participation
- Last decades also:
 - to increase fathers' participation in care
 - to promote a dual earner/dual carer model

Paid parental leave in Iceland

- Universal entitlements to three months paid parental leave in 1981 and six months in 1991
- The parental leave could be used by fathers, but they only used a fraction of it and mothers remained the main caregivers of young children

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."
- Supported by all political parties, unions, employee organisations and the general public

Entitlements

Each parent is granted 13 weeks of non-transferable leave (a so-called mothers' and fathers' quota), plus a further 13 weeks that parents can divide as they choose.

Parental leave benefits

- Working parents receive 80% of their income while on leave
- A flat-rate benefit is paid to non-working parents
- 2000-2004: No ceiling on benefits
- 2004: A relatively high ceiling implemented
- 2008-2009: The ceiling on benefits lowered severely because of the financial crisis
- 2013-2019: Incremental restoration of the ceiling

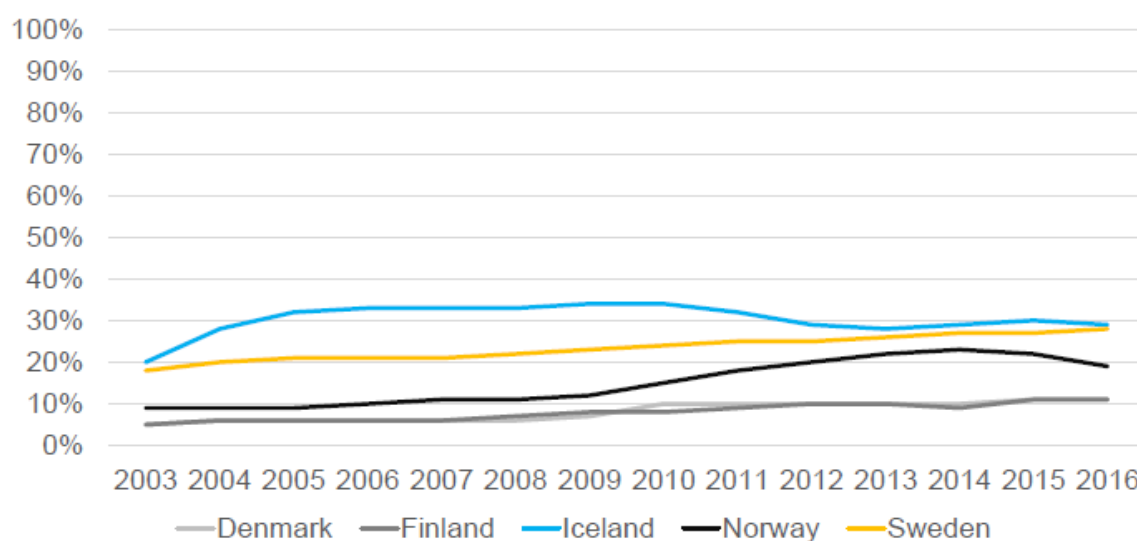
All parents included + high flexibility

- The mother is obligated to take leave the first two weeks after child birth but otherwise leave can be used as parents like until the child reaches the age of two
- Both parents are entitled to paid leave regardless of custody, gender, residency etc
- Only if the child does not have another parent is the parent given the right to all 39 weeks

Number of weeks of paid parental leave in the Nordic countries in 2019

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
Leave days in total	50	48	39	46	69
Only the father	0	9	13	15	13
Father with the mother	2	3	0	2	2

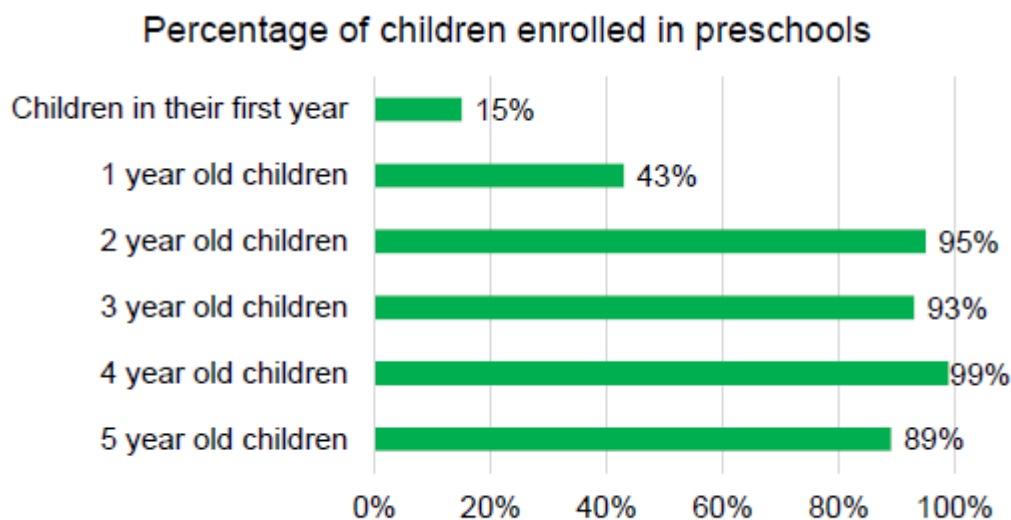
Percentage of the total leave period used by fathers in the Nordic countries



Source: nordicstatistics.org

The childcare gap in Iceland

Iceland is the only Nordic country that has not enacted legislation on children's right to ECEC at the end of paid parental leave. Children are often offered to start preschool at the age of two (see figure below) and therefore a childcare gap exists between the end of the paid parental leave period and preschool. Before being offered a place in preschool there is an option of placing the child in family day-care which is usually one employee taking care of up to five children in a private home.



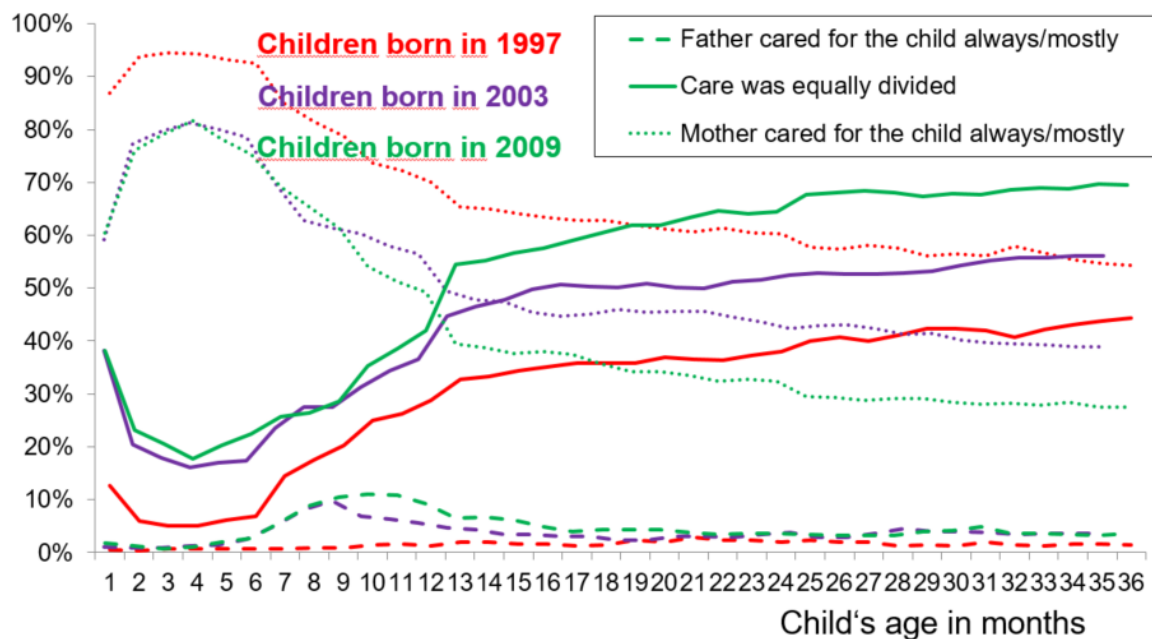
Researching the impact of the law on paid parental leave on parents' participation in work and care

Childcare and labour market participation of parents of children under the age of three is a research project aimed at assessing whether the aims of the law on paid parental leave have been reached.

Project leaders: Professor Guðný Björk Eydal and Associate professor Ingólfur V. Gíslason at the University of Iceland.

- Repeated surveys among parents who had their first child before and after the fathers' quota was introduced.
- The surveys involve questions on parents' labour market status from one year before childbirth until the child reaches the age of three, and who cared for the children during the first three years.

How did cohabiting and married parents divide care during the day?



Source: Arnalds, Eydal & Gíslason (2013)

Further support for the importance of the fathers' quota

- *Health behaviour in school-aged children*, a WHO collaborative cross national survey revealed that Icelandic children report a closer relationship with their fathers than do children in other countries (Source: <https://www.uib.no/en/hbscdata>)

Conclusion

- Fathers use their quota.
- Icelandic parents divide work and care more equally after the fathers' quota was introduced. The change is incremental and still ongoing.

For further information on paid parental leave in Icelandic and its impact, see:

Arnalds, Á. A., Duvander, A-Z., Eydal, G. B., & Gíslason, I. V. (2019). Constructing parenthood in times of crisis. *Journal of Family Studies*. doi: 10.1080/13229400.2019.1634622.

Arnalds, Á. A., Eydal, G. B., & Gíslason, I. V. (2013). Equal rights to paid parental leave and caring fathers- The case of Iceland. *Stjornmal og Stjornsysla*, 9(2), 323–344.
doi:10.13177//irpa.a.2013.9.2.4

Eydal, G. B. (2008). Policies promoting care from both parents - The case of Iceland. In G. B. Eydal & I. V. Gíslason (Eds.), *Equal rights to earn and care - parental leave in Iceland* (pp. 111–148). Reykjavík: Félagssvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands.

Eydal, G. B. & Gíslason, I. V. (Eds.). (2008). *Equal rights to earn and care - Parental leave in Iceland*. Reykjavík: Félagssvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands.