

Shared parental leave: learning from other EU countries

May 2016

Gender equality in the workplace cannot be achieved until there is equality at home. One of the biggest barriers to equality at home is the unequal sharing of childcare and the parental policies which enforce itⁱ. This factsheet demonstrates how we can learn from the EU countries leading the way.



Shared parental Leave (SPL), was created so mothers can share their 12 months of maternity leave with the other parent. **One year later, overall take up amongst fathers has not been as low as expected.** My Family Care's survey found the proportion of all men taking SPL was 1%.ⁱⁱ Whilst this may sound low, if every eligible father had taken SPL, it would still only be 5% of all men.ⁱⁱⁱ Research by TotalJobs found take up amongst eligible men at around 30%.^{iv}

Despite this, our [recent survey](#) found that employers still have some way to go. The complex policy has been difficult to understand, communicate and put into practice. If the government is serious about gender equality in the workplace, they must learn from the experiences of other countries and redesign the UK's parental policies, whilst employers need to enforce a cultural change regarding gender roles at home.

Why is equal parenting an issue for business?

Employers seeking to achieve gender equality cannot afford to ignore the negative impact of unequal childcare policies. Fathers and partners increasingly want to play a significant role in bringing up their children, **particularly millennials^v**. The pay gap amongst millennials is non-existent, so younger couples are more likely to share parenting if the decision is driven by family finances.

Shared parenting should mean that women will be less likely to experience pregnancy/maternity discrimination, agile working will be normalised for both men and women, women returning to work will be more likely to stay, and the gender pay gap will close over time.

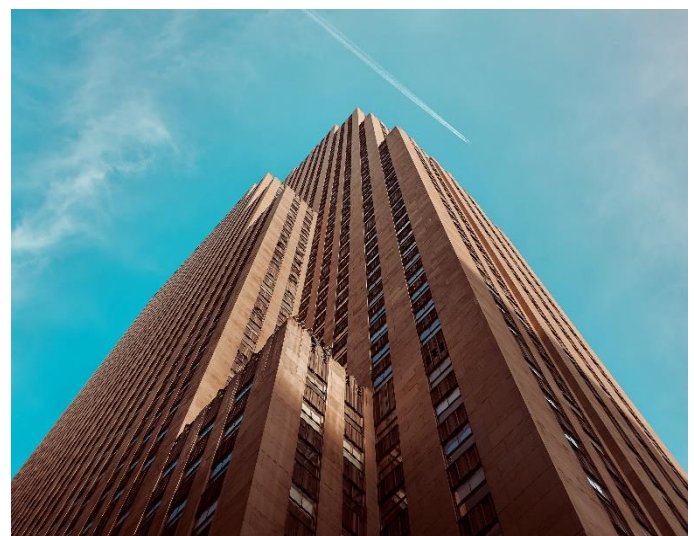


Photo source: Anders Jildén: StockSnap

4 components for shared parental leave success

1

Non-transferable

Research consistently shows that fathers want to spend more time with their new-borns, but the societal pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and the perceived impact on their careers, means fathers simply don't have enough incentive to take more than two weeks of paternity leave.

In all other EU countries, fathers are far more likely to take their leave if it is non-transferable.

Sweden saw very low take-up of parental leave amongst men for 20 years, so the government established a "daddy quota" of one month. The proportion of men taking more than one month of leave jumped from 9% to 47% almost instantly.^{vi}

A father quota allows men to take adequate leave even if their female partner isn't working – which SPL does not. Under the UK's current SPL policy, an estimated 2 in 5 fathers won't be eligible because their female partner is not in paid work and therefore has no maternity leave to share.^{vii}

3

Flexible

Flexibility can ease the financial cost of taking leave and make it easier for parents to keep in touch with their workplace^x, therefore providing parents with a real choice in how they care for their baby. Flexibility includes:

- Parents taking leave in succession
- Parents taking leave at the same time
- Taking intervals in the leave
- Working part time with half pay and for a longer period.

2

Well-paid

Parents' decision to take leave often comes down to family finances. If parental leave is unpaid or low paid, as it is in the UK, Ireland and Spain, take-up is much lower.^{viii}

Rather than offering a set value, the pay should be 90% of the parents' earnings with a ceiling of £30,000 per year. This is still lower than Sweden's, Denmark's and Norway's ceilings, but will ease the financial strain and stress on families whilst increasing loyalty to their employer.

Some countries offer an additional financial bonus if fathers take leave or if the parental leave is shared equally, to encourage take-up by fathers:

- Sweden offers a 'gender equality bonus' for each day shared equally;
- Portugal offers a bonus if the father shares part of the Initial Parental leave (formally Maternity Leave);
- Germany extends the paid leave by two months if the father takes at least two months of leave;
- Japan extends leave by two months if both parents use some of their leave entitlement.^{ix}

4

Gender-neutral

If families have a higher income from maternity leave than from parental leave, then mothers will continue to take most of the leave. To give parents a *real* choice on how they share parental responsibilities, all parental policies should offer equal income and time off.

Parental leave policies should be streamlined and the language should be de-gendered, such as in [Reward Gateway](#) and [EY's forward thinking approach](#).

How does the UK shape up against other EU countries?

United Kingdom^{xi}

Non-transferable Mothers can take 52 weeks of maternity leave - 39 of which are paid – and share 50 weeks with fathers (which is SPL). It can start 11 weeks before the due date.



Flexible

Gender-neutral

- 90% of pay
- 90% of pay - £139.58 per week ceiling
- Unpaid

Fathers or “secondary parents” can take two weeks of paternity leave. Both weeks are paid at 90% of their normal pay with a ceiling of £139.58 per week.

Unpaid parental leave includes 18 weeks per parent per child. Only four weeks can be taken in a year. It’s taken in one week blocks up until the child’s 18th birthday.

The terms used in the law include: parental, shared parental leave, maternity and paternity.

The ceiling of pay in the UK is very low compared to all other leading countries.

Sweden^{xii}

Non-transferable Parental leave includes a total of 480 days (69 weeks / 1.3 years) of paid leave per family. On top of that, both parents receive a gender equality bonus of SEK50 (about £4) for each day they share equally.



Flexible

Gender-neutral

- 77.6% of pay - £35,000 ceiling
- £14 per day

Each parent has 180 days (six months) which can be transferred between them, and the remaining 60 days (two months) are non-transferable. Leave is counted in days, but parents can also take their leave in part days.

Leave can be taken in one continuous period or up to three blocks. 30 days of each parent can be taken at same time until child is one year old. Mothers must take two weeks of leave initially, which is paid at 77.6% of earnings to a ceiling of approx. £26,000 a year.

Norway^{xiii}

Non-transferable

Norway's parental leave includes a choice between 49 weeks or 59 weeks of paid leave. Both have a ceiling of NOK530222 (approx. £40,000).

Well-paid

59 weeks

Flexible

49 weeks

Gender-neutral

59 weeks

■ 100% of pay

■ 80% of normal pay

The mother takes three weeks before the birth. After the birth, 10 weeks are reserved for the mother (which include mandatory six weeks after birth) and 10 for father, both of which are non-transferable. The father's quota cannot be taken during the first 6 weeks after birth (unless there are multiple births). The remaining 26 or 36 weeks can be taken by either parent – this is 'family leave'.

After the first six weeks, parents can combine the remaining leave and pay with part time work, and they can choose to take their leave at the same time or not. Family leave can be taken in one or multiple blocks of time.

The terms used in the legislation are gender-neutral: birth leave and parental leave.

Iceland^{xiv}

Non-transferable

Iceland offers 9 months of paid leave for families.

Well-paid

39 weeks

Flexible

39 weeks

Gender-neutral

■ 80% of normal pay - ISK 370,000 (£1,890) per month ceiling

Parents have three months (13 weeks) of non-transferable leave each, and an additional 3 months which can be shared however they choose.

One month of the mother's leave can be taken before the birth. The leave can be taken in one continuous period or in blocks, and it can be taken on a part time or full time basis. Parents can be on leave together if they wish, and the leave can be taken up to two years after the birth.

The term used in the legislation is gender neutral: birth leave.

Denmark^{xv}

Non-transferable

Denmark offers up to three years of leave per parent – 12 months of which are paid

Well-paid



Flexible

■ 67% of parents' net income each ■ Unpaid

Gender-neutral

All employees get a daily pay based on normal earnings, up to a ceiling of DKK 4,135 (approx. £400) per week. Whilst the 32 weeks of leave is per parent, the 32 weeks of pay is per family.

The mother has 18 weeks, including 4 weeks before the birth and a compulsory 2 weeks after the birth – all of which are full pay with the DKK 4,135 (approx. £400) per week ceiling. Each parent can extend their 32 weeks to 40 weeks with family benefit level reduced. Fathers or partners get 2 weeks of leave with the same pay as maternity.

Germany^{xvi}

Non-transferable

In Germany, each parent is entitled to 12 months (52 weeks) of paid leave up to three years after childbirth.

Well-paid



Flexible

■ 67% of parents' net income each - 1,800 Euros per month ceiling ■ Unpaid

Gender-neutral

If fathers take two months of leave, their paid leave is extended by two months (12 + 2). Alternatively, payment can be spread over 24 (+ 4) months instead, with the monthly benefit halved. If parents work part time, they can still be paid half the parental benefit for up to two years.

Since 2015, both parents can take up to three leave intervals (previously two). Parents can take their leave at the same time.

Parents on a low income of below 1000 Euros per month are entitled to an increased parental benefit.

Mothers have 14 weeks of maternity leave. They can take six weeks before the birth and must take eight weeks after. This is paid at 100% of normal earnings with no ceiling.

The terms used in the legislation include: maternity leave and parental leave.

Sources

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