

“The Political Path to a Dual-Earner/Dual-Carer Society: Pitfalls and Possibilities”

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Abstract

What are the political pathways to the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model? Are most countries likely to attain only a partial transformation of policies, and societies, rather than a full embrace of this model? This paper examines the development of work-family policies in Western Europe to probe the politics and consequences of these programs. In many countries, the political context frustrates efforts to enact a unified, comprehensive vision like the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model. Rather than achieving gender egalitarian arrangements for work and care, countries may stall halfway there. Advocates should be careful in what they ask for and be aware of the challenge of keeping gender egalitarian goals at the center of a policy-making process over which they will not have full control.

Janet Gornick and Marcia Meyers highlight real-world examples of policies that have brought several countries closer to the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model. Doing so offers some hope for reformers, showing that gender-egalitarian policy change is possible in the world today. Yet, as they also note, public policies are not enough to achieve the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model in practice: social and economic changes must follow, some of which are beyond the realm of public policy. They also observe that no country has yet fully adopted the necessary policies that would make the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model possible. These facts raise several questions: what are the barriers to the full adoption of this model of public policy? Are there risks in what we are more likely to see – partial transformation of policies, and societies, rather than a full embrace of the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model?

This paper addresses these questions as a way to explore the politics of the work-family issue as it is now playing out in Western Europe. Governments in many European countries now embrace the goal of improving the lives of working parents, and the Scandinavian model is ever-present in the minds of these policy-makers. Yet, the political context in most countries frustrates efforts to enact a unified, comprehensive vision like the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model. More commonly, countries have adopted partial measures without a coherent, overarching framework that unites them. These partial reforms can be extremely helpful to parents and may ultimately cumulate into something close to the model described by Gornick and Meyers. However, some of these policies risk undercutting larger reform efforts and reinforcing the traditional division of labor. Rather than arriving at a set of gender egalitarian arrangements for work and care, countries may stall halfway there in a modified male breadwinner model.

Even the Nordic countries have not yet attained the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model in either public policy or practice. Although men's role in caregiving has increased in many of these countries, women still take the vast majority of parental leave days and often reduce their working hours while their children are young. This preserves women's attachment to paid work and enables the balancing of paid work and family, but equality in the domestic division of labor is far from being achieved. One of the most important policy measures that could further this goal – mandating the equal sharing of parental leave time – has not been enacted, outside of a measure adopted in Iceland that reserves one-third of parental leave time for men. In Sweden, recent debates about such a reform came to naught, as both public opinion and the leadership of the major political parties were against the idea.

These realities should not lead to pessimism about the likelihood of any country ever reaching the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model. Several countries have gone a long way towards this model, and one can envision future policy and societal changes that will enable these countries to achieve a more egalitarian division of labor. What current work-family politics in Western Europe do reveal are some lessons about the pathways to this model, and potential pitfalls along the way. Advocates should be careful in what they ask for, as seemingly “family-friendly” policies such as extended parental leaves are likely to undermine gender equality, particularly if there are few incentives (or requirements) that men take these leaves. More generally, one of the greatest challenges that advocates will face is to keep gender egalitarian goals at the center of a policy-making process over which they will not have full control. Governments in Western Europe appear increasingly inclined to promote women's employment, yet they are often

driven by other aims, such as increasing fertility rates or improving economic efficiency. Although the new climate offers opportunities for policy change, advocates will have to work to make sure that gender equality objectives shape the design of work-family policies.

Political Lessons from the Nordic Countries

The Nordic countries are the best case scenarios for dual-earner/dual-caregiver policies, with their extensive public child care systems, generous parental leave rights for both parents, and rights for parents to work reduced hours. Yet, even in these countries, advocates have struggled to keep gender egalitarian motivations at the center of the policy-making process, and certain policies, like a mandated sharing of parental leave, have yet to be enacted. Although it may only be a matter of time and further societal change before these countries attain the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model, some scholars worry that these countries may be stalling part-way, in part due to some unintended consequences of family-friendly policies.

The development of work-family policies in the Nordic countries has been shaped by unusual political circumstances that are not likely to be replicated in other countries. Three of the four (Denmark, Norway, Sweden) have frequently been governed by social democratic parties allied with a powerful union movement, both of which are committed to a generous and universal welfare state.¹ These are also centralized political systems in which the use of corporatist bargaining arrangements is often employed to build agreement around a particular course of action. This makes possible more unified action on policy than found in many other nations.² In addition, Nordic societies are

homogeneous, albeit with increased diversity in recent years owing to immigration, and are highly secular. The latter has been important in dampening traditional attitudes towards gender roles or matters of sexuality, and these countries were pioneers in the liberalization of laws on divorce, abortion, and homosexuality, and in the treatment of women as individuals in the law, not as subservient to husbands and fathers.³

All of these factors enabled the transition from a male-breadwinner model of social policy, which had been dominant in the post-World War Two period, to a model that assumed all women would, and should, be in paid work. The transition began in the late 1960s and 1970s, when both labor shortages and a wide-ranging societal debate about sex roles spurred a shift in social democratic ideology about women's employment.⁴ Women's groups, often acting within unions and the political parties, played a critical role in putting this issue on the agenda and demanding egalitarian policies.⁵ The shift in policy was facilitated by the weakness of conservative political forces, although opposition was stronger in Norway and Finland.⁶ It also was facilitated by bargains reached within corporatist institutions, which insulated policy-makers from the larger political environment.⁷

The Nordic countries also benefited from the fact that educational programs for pre-schoolers were weakly developed at the time they began debating the need for public child care. For instance, in the early 1970s, Sweden and Norway had the lowest availability of preschool programs of nearly any country in the western world, with a mere two percent of four-year-old children attending preschool in Sweden, compared to over 80 percent in France and the Netherlands.⁸ Preschool programs often are structured around purely educational objectives, rather than seeking to provide both pedagogic

stimulation and help working parents. Once institutionalized, these programs can be difficult to change later on due to resistance by teachers and education ministries. Thus, the weak development of these programs in the Nordic countries left a void that could then be filled by a unified set of programs that fused care-giving and educational motivations – the “educare” model.⁹ In this way, the initially slow expansion of the Nordic early childhood education system actually enabled more coherent policy-making.

Even under these auspicious circumstances, it has at times been challenging to keep gender equality goals at the forefront of work-family policy. The dual-earner/dual-caregiver ideal has been strongest in Sweden but weaker elsewhere.¹⁰ The earliest Swedish policies reflected these aims: in 1974, Sweden was the first country to abolish maternity leave and replace it with a parental leave to which both parents were entitled, the explicit purpose being that men and women should share this leave. In 1979, parents of small children gained the right to work a six-hour day. Not content to simply enable men to spend more time at home, the government also began vigorous public campaigns to try to turn “men into fathers.” Thus, public officials created a series of posters showing famous weight-lifter Hoa-Hoa Dahlgren and other men holding babies.¹¹ The government also began massive investments in public child care.

The other Nordic countries have been less fully committed to the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model. In the case of Denmark, Anette Borchorst argues that gender equality goals have never been the main objective of work-family policies, which were instead driven by labor shortages and the increase in women’s workforce participation.¹² Concern about changing men’s roles entered less into the debate or public policy. Thus, although Denmark has long had the greatest availability of public

child care in the region, parental leave was instituted only in 1984, and a quota of daddy days was created in 1998 but eliminated in 2002.

In Finland and Norway, there has been stronger conservative resistance to mothers working while their children are young. Norway has the most significant Christian democratic party in the region, and this party has helped unify conservative opposition to public child care.¹³ In Finland, social democrats have never been hegemonic, but frequently shared or alternated power with a center-right agrarian party whose rural constituency is less interested in public day care. In both countries, there was a strong push from center-right parties to institute home care allowances that parents could use to either stay home for several years or to help pay for informal or private forms of care.¹⁴ Finland first instituted a home care allowance in the mid-1980s and later expanded it. Norway created a similar allowance in the 1990s.¹⁵ Even Sweden briefly had such a measure: in 1994, a conservative government created a similar cash-for-care allowance, although it was immediately revoked when the social democrats came back to power later that year.

Home care allowances contravene the goals of the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model. As these are flat-rate payments, rather than income-related benefits, men have virtually no incentives to take these leaves and rarely do. And because the leave period usually lasts until the child is three, mothers are encouraged to leave the labor market for up to three years. In Finland, the effects of this on women's employment have been somewhat counterbalanced by the requirement that all municipalities offer children a place in day care whose parents desire it. Social democrats pushed hard for this requirement so that the care allowance would not undermine the public child care system

or constrain parental choices. In Norway, the development of the day care system has been slower and so parents lack real choices between work and care in some parts of the country.¹⁶

More problematic for the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model has been the failure to mandate equal sharing of the lengthy parental leave. On the one hand, the Nordic countries pioneered the use of daddy-only days to increase men's use of parental leave. The number of weeks in the daddy quota has expanded in both Sweden and Norway, and is now six weeks in Norway, two months in Sweden. There is no doubt that these measures have increased men's use of leave days. Men in Sweden take the highest percentage of parental leave days – a little under 19 percent in 2004, which represents a significant increase from the past. When the gender-neutral parental leave was created in the 1970s, men took only about two percent of leave days, on average, and that rose to over 6 percent on average in the 1980s. Thus, the combination of daddy-only quotas and moral suasion on the part of Swedish authorities has made a difference in promoting a more equal distribution of the leave.

On the other hand, the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model requires that the leave be equally split between men and women, and this is unlikely to be achieved without a policy mandate. This is extremely important: long and generous parental leaves are a great help to many parents, but if women alone take them, they risk being stereotyped as less committed to the workforce and could suffer job discrimination as a result. Although Swedish men take a relatively high proportion of parental leave days, women still take over 80 percent of the leave days, and the proportion is higher in the other Nordic countries: in 2003, nearly 95 percent of the days were taken by women in Denmark and

Finland, and 91 percent in Norway.¹⁷ For this reason, feminists and fatherhood activists have advocated mandating either an equal split of the entitlement, or else the Icelandic 3-3-3 model, in which each parent is entitled to one-third of the leave and the last third is to be shared.

Thus far, these ideas have gained little political traction. In Sweden, a government commission declared in 2005 that Sweden should augment the length of its well-paid leave to 15 months (from 13), and entitle men to 5 months, women to 5 months, and allow the rest to be shared. None of the major political parties endorsed the idea, however, outside of the recently-created, and politically-unsuccessful, Feminist Party. The social democratic party leadership also was skeptical while in power, instead favoring bonus payments for fathers who take more months of leave.

One obstacle to mandating the equal sharing of leave is the fact that if men did not take up their share, children would have to go to day care much earlier and the state would have to build more day care centers and outfit them for infant care. Infant care is expensive, particularly as it requires higher staff-child ratios. Currently, most Swedish children do not start in day care until they are 16 months of age. In 2005, for example, a total of 30 children under the age of one were in publicly-funded day care, of which 8 were in center-based care and 22 were in family day care.¹⁸ Thus, the current system of lengthy parental leaves serves the interests of state officials eager to keep down the costs of child care.

In addition, public opinion appears unfavorably disposed towards mandating an equal sharing of leave time. Some fear that if such a policy were instituted, many men would simply not take the leave, and these months would be lost to the family. Women

would have to go back to work earlier, and babies would have to go to day care, neither of which are popular ideas. Such an outcome would also run counter to powerful “expert” signals sent to Swedish parents about the importance of parental care during the first year of life, and that mothers should breastfeed their babies for a lengthy period of time.¹⁹ Since the 1980s, the Swedish government has led a campaign to encourage breastfeeding and help mothers do it, and currently more than 75 percent of children are breastfed (exclusively or partially) at the age of six months, a very high proportion.²⁰ Similar concerns have been raised in other Nordic countries about proposals to equally split the leave. In Norway, for example, the issue of breastfeeding has been a strong argument used against adoption of the Icelandic model.²¹

More generally, there is evidence from several of these countries that parents prefer to divide the parental leave largely as they have done so far, with mothers taking most of the leave.²² It is hard to know how much this is a result of various constraints that people face, such as the actions of private employers, the lack of infant day care, and a strong normative presumption against using such services for very young children. Clearly, different societal standards and expectations are applied to men and women when it comes to parental leave. When fathers take 10 weeks of leave this is considered “long” and something for which to reward them, whereas a 10-week period of leave for mothers is seen as too short.²³ As one Swedish mother said to an interviewer, “It would have been seen as quite weird, had I not stayed at home when the child was young.”²⁴ Given these views, some scholars argue that the lengthy parental leave has reinforced the norm that mothers should be at home with their children for at least the first year of their lives.²⁵

The generalization of part-time work poses some similar risks, as women are more likely to reduce their working hours than men. Reduced work time may be popular with parents that wish to shorten the length of time children spend in day care. One problem, however, is that as part-time work becomes widespread for women working in particular sectors of the economy, these sectors become organized around the assumption that many of their employees will work part-time. This became a great concern to the main Swedish trade union confederation, the LO, as the problem of involuntary part-time work (or “part-time unemployment”) became apparent. For example, a study of Swedish nurses found that over half had been forced into part-time work during the past five years.²⁶ Thus, as with parental leave, the creation of a gender-neutral right to part-time work has created or reinforced gender inequality in labor markets – reflecting both economic realities and societal beliefs about gender roles in work and care.

Yet, these norms need not be irreversible; the power of public policy to shape social behavior can be seen in the effects of the Icelandic parental leave reform on men’s use of leave time. In 2000, Iceland lengthened its parental leave from six to nine months, with three months reserved only for the father, three for the mother, and three that could be shared between the two however they wished. The reform was phased in over three years, with an additional month available to men in 2001, 2002, and 2003. The reform also replaced the flat-rate parental leave benefit with a benefit that replaces 80 percent of earnings.²⁷ As figure one shows, these changes had a dramatic effect on men’s use of parental leave, with men’s leave usage increasing each year as the entitlement was expanded. While women usually take the remaining six months of leave, this is

considerably shorter than the leave period taken by women in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Norway.

Why was Iceland able to adopt this change when other countries have not? One answer may lie in the relatively late development of Iceland's parental leave system. Iceland created a three-month paid leave in 1980, and expanded it to six months in the 1990s – still relatively short compared to the other Nordic countries. Although women pushed for extending the overall length of the leave, the Icelandic government decided only to expand the entitlement of men, adding three months of daddy-only time onto the existing six months of leave.²⁸ While this lengthened the leave, it did not require taking anything away from what women already had – their own leave time was not shortened unless they chose to split some of three months that either partner could take. By contrast, the other Nordic countries already have long leaves that women are accustomed to, and so creating a daddy-only quota within the existing leave will subtract from women's leave time. Attempting to appease this view by adding on more months to the existing leave would make the entire parental leave system very long and expensive. Thus, Iceland may have benefited by being a relative laggard; once it decided to expand the parental leave, it was able to do so in a gender-egalitarian way.

What lessons can be learned about the political path to a dual-earner/dual-caregiver model in the Nordic countries? These countries represent the best-case scenario for the adoption of this model. As many analysts have pointed out, however, the low take-up rates of parental leave and part-time work by men impede the realization of this ideal. It appears that the only way to achieve fundamental change is by mandating the equal sharing of parental leave time, yet currently this idea lacks sufficient support

among political elites and mass publics. That hardly means these countries have reached the endpoint of their work-family policies; the degree of social change over the past three-to-four decades is remarkable, as women's workforce participation rapidly increased and men began taking on a greater role in caring for children. If social norms and practices continue to change, one can imagine openings for truly egalitarian parental leave policies that achieve the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model.

Work-Family Policies in Continental Europe

Governments in continental Europe are less likely to engage in the kind of unified, coherent policy-making found in the Nordic states, and thus more likely to introduce only pieces of the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model. In many of these countries, partial reforms have made a difference in helping parents reconcile work and family, but there are risks attached to some of these measures. More than in Scandinavia, public policies in much of continental Europe often focus on restructuring mothers' work and caring time than on either changing men's behavior or improving access to care services. Thus, these policies may "solve" the difficulties parents face in a way that undermines the push for more gender-egalitarian reforms.

Outside of Scandinavia, most European countries were long exemplars of the male breadwinner model of social policy that provided few supports to working mothers. Many were dominated by conservative or Christian democratic parties that hewed to a traditional vision of gender roles and family life.²⁹ Child care was seen as a purely family responsibility, not one deserving of state intervention. Thus, short maternity

leaves and the low provision of child care services made it difficult, if not impossible for mothers to combine paid work and family.³⁰

Policy change has come slowly, but intensified in recent years. France and Belgium started expanding their public day care services and subsidies in the 1970s and 1980s. Other European countries have begun embracing the goal of helping parents balance paid work and family since the 1990s, spurred in part by economic and demographic conditions. Increasingly, policy-makers fear the prospect of labor shortages and a declining population to sustain expensive pension commitments to the baby boomer generation. International and supranational organizations have also put work-family reconciliation on the agenda, with the European Union setting targets for mothers' employment and child care provision and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) chiding states who lack adequate early childhood care and education programs.³¹

These and other imperatives have impelled changes in some of the most conservative welfare regimes. Since the 1990s, the Netherlands has adopted a strategy of encouraging part-time work for all parents and expanding child care subsidies. This has produced a dramatic increase in women's employment, albeit largely in part-time work. In Germany, both demographic decline and the so-called "PISA shock" (OECD-PISA study showing the academic weaknesses of German children when compared to other nations) have spurred the current grand coalition government to create a well-paid parental leave and encourage municipalities to develop more child care centers.³² The British Labour government also has expanded the maternity leave system and increased

the resources devoted to public child care, although much of the latter has been in part-time services.³³

One challenge to coherent work-family policies in these countries is that most maintain a sharp division between education and care programs. For example, in France and Belgium – two countries often held up as exemplars of good policy in Western Europe – there is an institutionalized divide between pre-schools and day care. Preschools form the backbone of their early childhood care and education system, offering universal services for all children between the ages of three and six years old.³⁴ These are largely free to parents and are open during a long school day (usually 8:30-3:30 or 8:30-4:30), with programs often closed one afternoon a week.³⁵ For children below the age of three, the situation is more heterogeneous: there are *crèches* run by local governments that are publicly funded, yet access to these programs is fairly limited (about 10 percent of children under the age of three in France). There also are subsidized and regulated networks of family day care, which are more widely available than the *crèches* in both countries.

Different institutional actors have responsibility for these two areas of policy, making coherent planning difficult. Family policy or child welfare institutions generally oversee day care for the under-threes (and after-school care) whereas educational ministries control the preschools and tend to view them as educational programs without a care-giving vocation.³⁶ These understandings, combined with the institutional division, make it difficult, if not impossible, to forge a coherent “educare” policy of the kind found in the Nordic countries. It also impedes changes to the opening hours of the schools to make them compatible with parents’ work schedules.³⁷ In many countries, preschool

programs and the regular school system offer short-day programs and lack lunch facilities at school. Changing these practices usually runs up against powerful interests for the status quo, both among teachers' unions and education ministry officials. Further complicating matters is the fact that day care policy has been substantially decentralized to local governments since the 1980s in France, and to the regional governments in Belgium.

Such difficulties of coordinating care and education are common outside of the Nordic countries, as responsibility is usually divided between social services or family ministries and educational ones.³⁸ Federal systems exacerbate this bureaucratic fragmentation. In Germany, the federal system assigns responsibility for child care and preschool education policies to the *Länder*, municipality, and district, and reserves a large role for the voluntary sector.³⁹ It is therefore challenging for the federal government to achieve changes in school schedules or the availability of public day care.

Another source of fragmentation in the policy-making process is that work-family policies are often driven by multiple and at times competing goals. France, for example, has lurched back and forth between various policy objectives since the 1970s. Initially, the goal was to assist working mothers, but as unemployment rates rose by the end of that decade, governments created a three-year unpaid leave to encourage mothers to stay at home. Then a socialist government came to power and day care was again a priority, but this quickly lost ground to anti-unemployment and fiscal concerns. A benefit was created for mothers who stay home for several years, and subsidies were created for cheaper, less regulated forms of care (family day care, nannies).⁴⁰ Notably, gender equality was *never* one of the dominant motivations: helping out working mothers has been one objective,

but French policy-makers have never really sought to tackle the gendered division of labor and unequal take-up of parental leave time in the way that Sweden or Iceland have tried to do.

The shifting motivations of French policy-makers can be found in many other European countries, as gender equality aims sometimes compete with economic, demographic, or educational objectives. For decades, the fight against unemployment has been preminent, and this has produced policies that reduce the supply of women in paid work, such as lengthy care leaves.⁴¹ Somewhat paradoxically, the concern in the past 10 to 15 years has shifted to activating *more* of the labor supply rather than reducing it, particularly with an eye to future labor shortages and concerns about demographic decline. These concerns have dovetailed with debates about the need to help solo mothers attain self-sufficiency. Thus, governments increasingly privilege activation, particularly of women's employment.

While this may open up a window of opportunity for policy change, the challenge for advocates of a dual-earner/dual-caregiver model is to keep gender egalitarian goals front and center. In recent years, many European countries have reformed and expanded their parental leave systems and augmented rights for parents to work part-time.⁴² The expansion of affordable, public child care has been slower, and in fact the increase in subsidized caring time at home may reduce pressure for continued development of child care services. Indeed, one reason governments have created such leaves or reduced work time possibilities has been to reduce their own responsibility for such programs. In this, they are often successful. In France, the expansion of the home care allowance in the mid-1990s produced a sharp drop in the employment of mothers with two children.⁴³

This took some pressure off public officials to improve access to the public *crèches*, and the proportion of children in these programs has been constant since the early 1990s.

Even where gender egalitarian goals are officially present, societal outcomes may defy policy-makers' expectations. The Netherlands adopted a law that, since 2000, gives *all* employees the right to request reduced work hours from their employers. One of the stated aims of allowing all people to request part-time work was to give parents the ability to be in paid work yet still have time to care for their children. One hope was that, with *all* people having the right to work part-time, both fathers and mothers would reduce their working hours and divide up work and caring time more equally – the *combinatie scenario*.⁴⁴ With each parent working three or four days a week, the child would attend child care for two or three days each week, and be home for the rest.

Despite these gender egalitarian intentions, in practice very few couples actually follow this model. In 2005, for example, in only 8 percent of couples with young children were women working full-time (over 35 hours/week), whereas in 52 percent of couples women worked part-time and in 40 percent women did not work at all.⁴⁵ If anything, fathers' time in paid work has increased over the past decade, and while their time in unpaid work has increased somewhat, it is still considerably less than the time women spend in unpaid work. In 2005, in couples with at least one child under age five, men performed on average a little over 23 hours of unpaid work each week, compared to over 47 hours of unpaid work done by women. Men were in paid work an average of 41-1/2 hours per week, whereas women spent on average 14 hours per week in paid work.⁴⁶

Do policies allowing extended leaves and part-time work reinforce traditional gender roles? Or are they promoting some slow changes in social practices and beliefs?

There is little data that can satisfactorily address this question, but we can at least note that there has been some shift in beliefs about mothers working while their children are young. Comparative public opinion data shows declining support for the traditional male breadwinner model in the last decade (figure two). Particularly in countries such as Austria, Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands, the previously high support for the idea that mothers should be at home full-time while their children are young has dropped. Even though mothers work far fewer hours than men in a country such as the Netherlands, they have a much stronger attachment to the labor force than in the past, when the Dutch had some of the lowest rates of female workforce participation in Europe.

At the same time, however, the percentage of people who believe mothers should work full-time is not very high, even though it has gone up somewhat (figure three). Increasingly, the public in many of these countries – including the Nordic countries – favor the idea of a reduced work schedule for mothers. There are multiple ways to interpret these figures: it may be that if it were truly possible for mothers to work full-time while they had young children, more people would embrace the idea of them doing so. On the other hand, even in Sweden where mothers' full-time work is possible, support for the idea is fairly low. One might therefore conclude that the public is fairly comfortable with policies that restructure mothers' time so that they can spend time with their children while they are young yet still preserve their place in employment.

Political Lessons from Western Europe

What are some of the lessons we can draw from the European experience with work and family policies? One is that advocates of the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model of public policy should proceed cautiously. As the experiences of both the Nordic and continental European countries show, advocates are likely to get only part of their package of reforms implemented, and countries could stall halfway along the path to this model. Part-time work for women can undercut the drive for other kinds of reforms, and become entrenched as a pattern of behavior and set of economic structures that are difficult to alter. Long parental leaves have similar effects, particularly if they dampen pressures for expanded child care spending by allowing parents more paid leave time at home.

One way to deal with this is to keep the emphasis on care services and slowly expand parental leave. In Finland, for example, social democrats pushed to create a right for parents to have access to care services, ensuring that no one is forced to take a lengthy leave against their will. Both Finland and Sweden now mandate that all children have access to a day care place by a certain age.⁴⁷ Still, the lack of services for children below the age of one, coupled with powerful societal expectations about the acceptable age for infants to go to day care, ensures that there is little choice for mothers during the first year of their child's life. The lack of real choices is more evident in other parts of Europe, where child care services for under-threes are insufficient and, in countries like Britain or the Netherlands, often quite expensive. Taking a lengthy parental leave or part-time work may thus be the only option, and usually mothers are the ones to reduce their working time. This may correspond with their preference, but as long as adequate care services are lacking, it is hard to know whether mothers are truly exerting their "free choice" in the matter or not.

Another lesson is that gender equality advocates should work to make sure that expansions of parental leave time come largely through increased rights for fathers. Once lengthy and generous leave entitlements are in place and de facto taken by mothers, it may be difficult to reverse these entitlements. Iceland resisted calls for expanding the parental leave in general, and instead added only additional months for fathers, and the result was a significant increase in the percentage of days taken by men. This could be a good model for other countries looking to expand their parental leaves. The 2006 parental leave reform in Germany created a 12-month, well-paid leave open to both parents, but added two additional months that could only be taken by the partner who has not taken the bulk of the leave. Notably, the original proposal was for a 10-month leave, with two additional months for the father, but this ran into opposition on the grounds that the leave mothers would likely take would be too short. Even though reformers had to compromise and add more months to what would likely be the mothers' time off, including mandates for the other partner to take leave is an important way to implant gender equality objectives when the leave is being created.

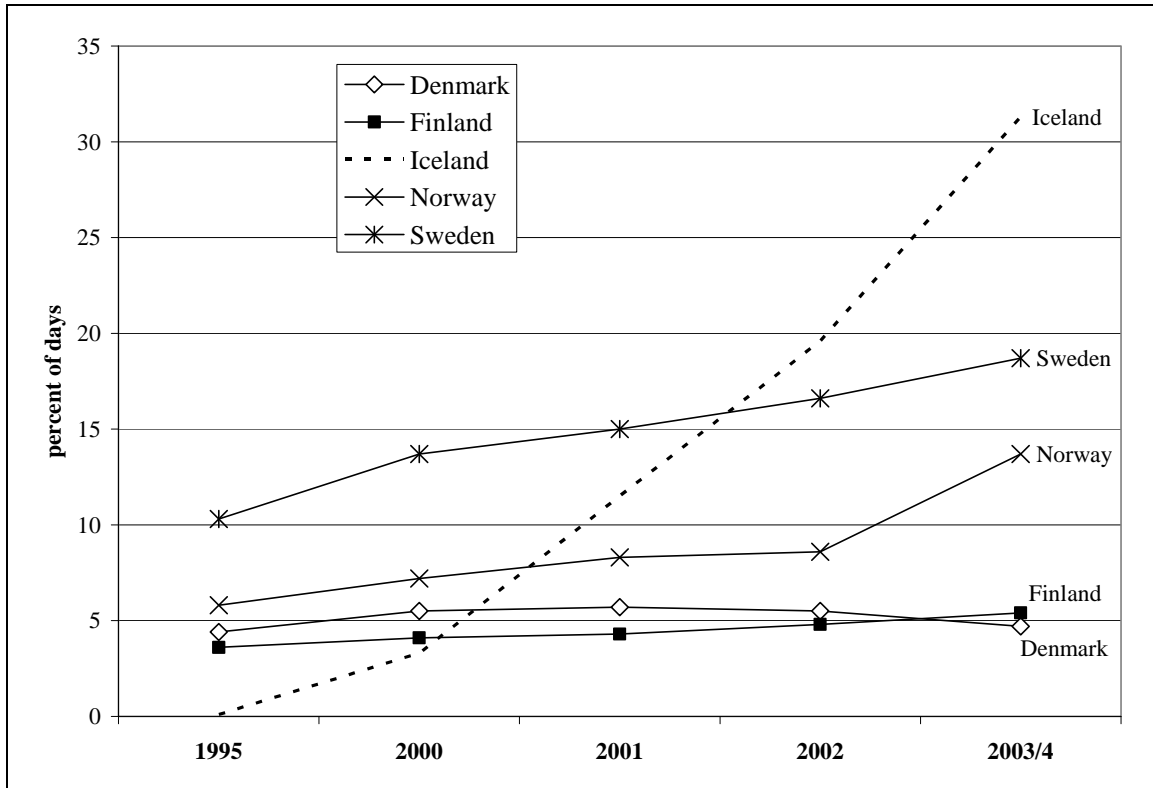
A third lesson is about the multi-dimensional nature of work-family policies, which offers both opportunities and pitfalls for reformers. State investment in this area can be justified on a number of grounds, such as pedagogic aims, fostering gender equality, improving economic efficiency, or combating demographic decline, among others. In some political climates, some of these rationales may be more effective than others, yet could produce policies that are helpful to parents or good for children while hardly advancing the gender-egalitarian aims of the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model. Early childhood education programs offer an apt example: the expansion of these

programs has been justified largely on pedagogic grounds, and there is now wide agreement across Western Europe that young children benefit from access to these programs. Yet, reforms based on these aims often produce part-time programs that are ill-adapted to the needs of working parents. Once in place, such programs can be difficult to change; German reformers are now grappling with how to transform their largely part-day programs with often irregular schedules (particularly in the Western Länder) into longer-day programs.

At the same time, the multiple dimensions of work-family policies may be a source of coalition-building, enabling groups with diverging perspectives to agree on reforms that meet multiple objectives. A system of universal, early childhood education as was developed in France could be popular in other countries as both a form of educational enrichment, and as a help to working parents. Although not perfectly adapted to parents' work schedules, some municipalities have added on after-school services that round out the already lengthy day spent in these programs, and parents can otherwise use subsidies to help purchase child care for the hours after school. The French approach thus preserves the educational goals at the heart of the preschool system and enjoys wide support among parents, all of whom send their children to the preschool for its educational benefits whether they are in paid work or not. The French approach also does not attempt to make teachers extend their hours at school, which they would likely resist, but pragmatically builds upon existing services to help meet working parents' needs. The result is not the unified educare model found in the Nordic countries, but a heterogeneous mix of services and subsidies that address a wide range of parental preferences.

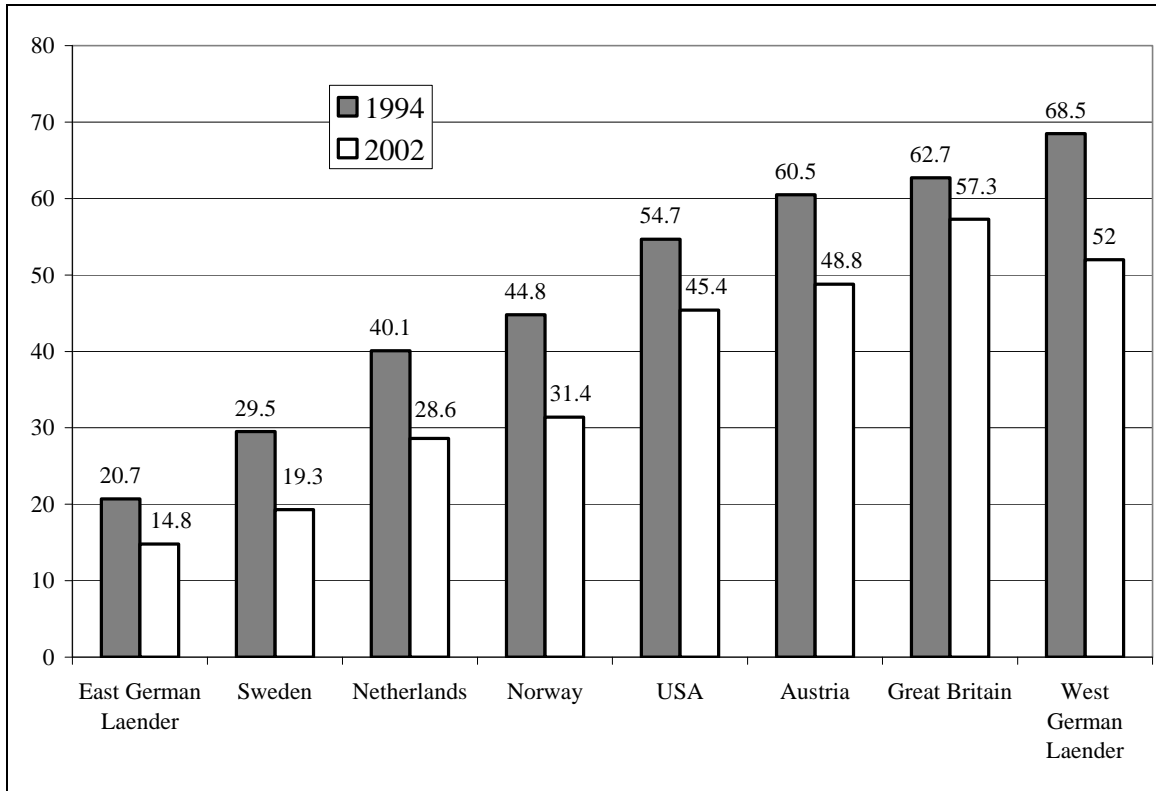
The challenge for gender-equality advocates will be to make sure that their aims are taken seriously by those in power who might be driven by other goals. A window of opportunity for policy change has been opening in many European countries, with concerns about demographic decline, future labor shortages, welfare dependency, and educational readiness sparking reform efforts in countries that previously did little to help parents balance work and family. Yet, governments may adopt policies that fail to advance their societies very far along the pathway to the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model, such as lengthy parental leaves that women largely take, or rights to part-time work that few men take advantage of. Equality advocates will thus have to fight to make sure that public policy not only seeks to ease the burden on women of work and care responsibilities, but also tries to shift some of that burden onto the shoulders of men.

Figure 1. Percentage of Parental Leave Days Taken by Fathers, 1994-2003/4.



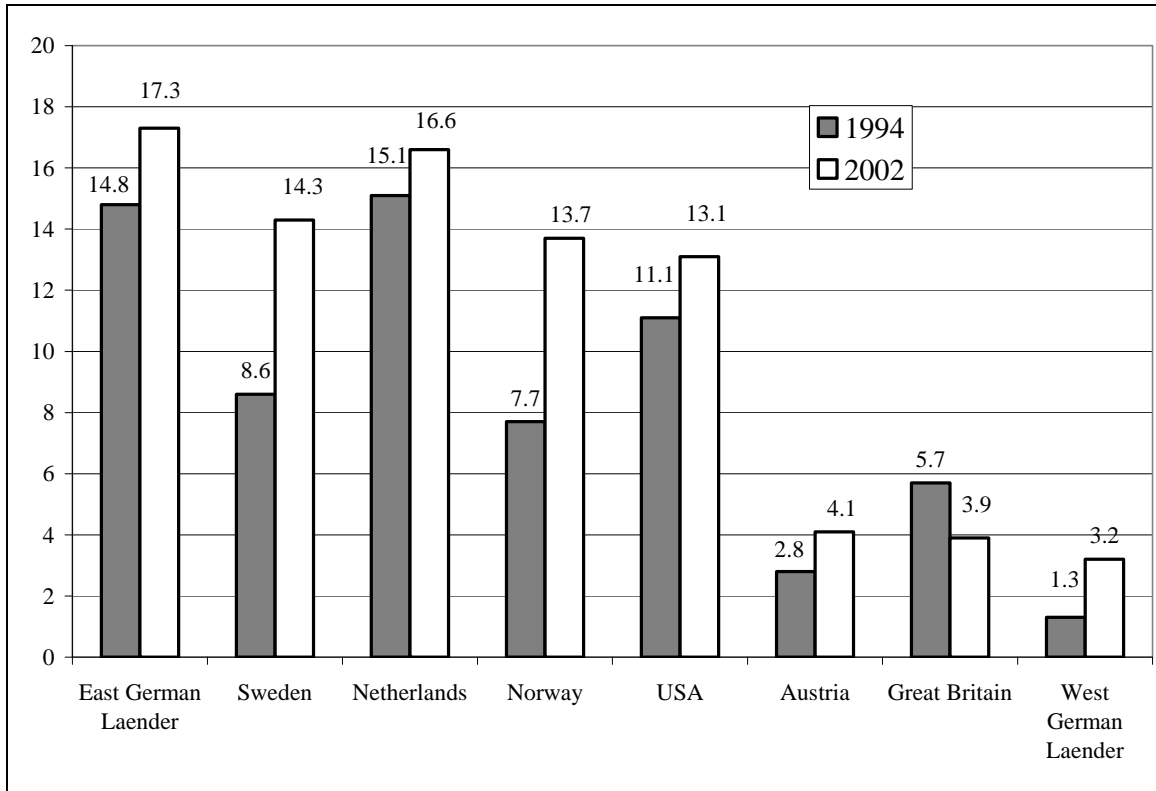
Source: Datta Gupta, Nabanita, Nina Smith, and Mette Verner. 2006. "Child Care and Parental Leave in the Nordic Countries: A Model to Aspire to?" IZA Discussion Paper No. 2014 (Bonn: Institute for the Study of Labor).

Figure 2. Percentage of respondents who believe mothers of preschool children should stay home full time, 1994 and 2002.



Source: International Social Survey Program, Family and Changing Gender Roles II and III.

Figure 3. Percentage of respondents who believe mothers of preschool children should work full time, 1994 and 2002.



Source: International Social Survey Program, Family and Changing Gender Roles II and III.

Notes

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³³ Lewis, "Family Change and Family Policies in the UK," *Journal for the Study of British Cultures* 9, no. 2 (2003): 209-22. The government's 2001 Employment Bill created a right for fathers to take two weeks' paternity leave, a right to 26 weeks paid adoption leave and 26 more weeks of unpaid leave, and extended the maternity leave to 26 weeks of paid leave and 26 more unpaid weeks.

³⁴ The age of entry into the preschool is two-and-a-half in both Belgium and France.

³⁵ Closing preschool and elementary school for one afternoon per week was instituted to allow time for parents to arrange for religious education. Although few parents arrange for such education any more, the continuation of this is an excellent example of the path dependence of now obsolete structures.

³⁶ In Belgium, this is complicated by the devolution of responsibility to the French- and Flemish speaking areas. In French-speaking Belgium, a Ministry of Childhood oversees all early childhood care and education, but there is still an administrative separation between education and care. In the Flemish areas, the Ministry of Education oversees the preschool system and the Ministry for Welfare, Family, and Equal Opportunities has responsibility for child care. OECD, *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Care and Education* (Paris: OECD, 2006): 283, 289.

³⁷ Some municipalities add on after-school care services for children attending these preschools as a cheaper way to provide day care: the facilities are paid for by the national education ministry, but the local government pays the costs of the care staff who work after official school hours. For some working parents, this rounds out the full work day, while others will hire a baby-sitter to pick up their child(ren) after preschool is over.

³⁸ OECD, *Starting Strong*, 46-7.

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