



Programme of Exchange of Good Practices on Gender Equality:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The second seminar of the programme was held in Reykjavik, Iceland, on 22 and 23 October 2008 and chose as its theme from the six priority areas of action of the European Commission's Roadmap on Equality parental leave.

The Icelandic system is generally viewed as being an excellent model, with many elements of transferability. The system has resulted in changing gender roles and increasing fertility rates. It has stimulated the sharing of work and family responsibilities and the provision of equal career opportunities, as well as changing attitudes. There have been a number of studies that have evaluated the impact of the parental leave system in Iceland which point to the positive impact of the provisions and the importance of parental leave to gender equality and the reconciliation of work and family life.

Prior to the seminar, an independent Icelandic expert on gender equality produced the host country report in accordance with the guidelines approved by the EC, and this was subsequently distributed to the independent experts of the countries attending the seminar, who themselves produced response reports (again based on approved guidelines). A compilation of all these reports – 'The Parental Leave System in Iceland: Seminar Reports' – is already in the possession of the EC.

The seminar commenced with a description of the parental leave system in Iceland in the form of keynote addresses on the following themes from Icelandic governmental representatives: the Icelandic parental leave system - "You are regarded as weird if you don't use the paternity leave"; policies promoting care from both parents; the social partners' view on the parental system; and an overview of the social partners' perspective on the parental system

This was followed by a presentation by the independent Icelandic expert of her report and, in the afternoon, a 'sofa session' during which four Icelandic fathers described their personal experience of the parental leave system.

The two parallel Thursday morning workshops focused particularly on two topics: the main gaps and challenges at the national level in promoting good quality parental leave; and the main pre-conditions for good quality parental leave, in particular vis-à-vis its contribution to gender equality.

The main lessons for policy from the exchange include: parental leave as a tool for equality between men and women and central to the reconciliation of work and family life; the need for a change in family culture, particularly in terms of encouraging men to take up leave and share family responsibilities; the introduction of non-transferable rights for fathers to take leave; the establishment of parental leave rights for all workers, including the self-employed and those working in small companies; the importance of a flexible leave system; an improvement in the integration between the parental leave and childcare systems; the importance of adequate financial compensation; the reduction of the gender pay gap as a means of encouraging the take-up of parental leave by men; and the achievement of a broad political, social and civil consensus that recognises that parental leave has important business benefits for the economy and for society at large.