The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

Instruments to foster long-term paternal involvement in family work
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Summary Report

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Introduction

This mutual learning seminar was hosted by the German government on the 4th and 5th October 2018 in Berlin. It explored approaches to promoting long-term paternal involvement in family work with a particular focus on parental leave arrangements. Good practices from Germany were presented and reviewed. Representatives and experts attended from Germany, Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden and the UK. The European Commission and the European Institute for Gender Equality also participated.

The seminar was opened by Dr. Birgit Schweikert, Head of the Directorate for Gender Equality, German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and by representatives from the European Commission.

The European Commission highlighted the significant gap between the aspirations expressed by mothers and fathers in relation to the management of their caring and family responsibilities and the reality of their current practice. The 2017 Eurobarometer found that 80% of men think that gender equality is important for them personally. However, women spend on average 21 hours per week on care and household activities, whereas men spend 9 hours. 84% of Europeans approve of a man doing an equal share of household activities and taking parental leave to care for his children. However, only 33% of men took/thought about taking paternity leave according to the 2018 Eurobarometer.

1. The good practice of the host country

1.1 A matter for gender equality policy and family policy

In opening the seminar, Dr. Birgit Schweikert, Head of the Directorate for Gender Equality, provided the gender equality perspective shaping the German good practice. Policy development in relation to paternal involvement in family work is anchored within several Directorates-General, in particular those for Gender Equality and Family Policy. She located development of this policy as one part of the fundamental systemic change, pursued since the enactment of the Basic Law nearly seventy years ago, of establishing a system of laws and values that turn away from the patriarchal system towards equal partnership in the family.

While important and effective legislation has been developed, significant differences remain between women and men in working life. She noted that culture and habits take time to change and legislation is only a start, albeit an important start in creating the framework conditions within which people can make decisions in a different way.

Policy to address gender gaps follows five lines: opening up all professional fields to men and women; more women in leadership positions; the creation of more equal pay through transparency in wage structures; the upgrading of social professions where the labour force consists primarily of women; and improving the reconciliation of family life and work. Violence against women and workplace harassment also remain a focus.

A gender care gap indicator has been developed and deployed. The Gender Care Gap stands at 52.4%. That means that women perform approximately 1.5 times as
much unpaid care work as men, on average 87 minutes more every day. The equal division of care work is key to the equal participation of women in society and in the labour market. Politics must create the framework conditions for this. The Work Life Balance package of the European Commission is contributing in this way.

1.2 Family policy promoting equal sharing of caring responsibilities and equal participation in paid work

The presented German good practice: Parental Allowance is the payment made within the broader parental leave policy. It was first introduced in 2007, responding to parental wishes where 60% of parents of young children surveyed were found to want an equal sharing of caring responsibilities and more equal participation in paid work.

Basic Parental Allowance, introduced in 2007, reflected a policy shift in explicitly addressing fathers and encouraging them to take up parental leave. It was accompanied by measures to enhance the childcare infrastructure and to support companies to take account of the ‘family factor’. A network of companies who want to promote family friendly workplaces has been supported. This has contributed to greater social partner understanding of the issues. In 2015/2016 a Memorandum of Understanding on the issue was agreed with the social partners. 77% of companies now say that being family friendly is important for business, up from 14% in 2006.

Basic Parental Allowance is a means tested family benefit payable to parents staying at home to care for their child. It is provided for 12 months, after the birth of the child. It can be extended by 2 months if both parents participate. Parents can distribute 14 months between themselves. It provides between 65% to 100% compensation of lost income. This is calculated on the net wage of the parent one year before the birth of the child. There is a minimum of 300 Euros and a cap of 1,800 Euros.

Parental Allowance provides an additional incentive for both parents to participate in family work and, being income related, makes take-up financially attractive to fathers. From 2006 to 2015 the rate of fathers on Parental Allowance increased from 3.5% to 36% and the employment rate of mothers with children aged 2 to 3 years increased from 42% to 58%. The impact is seen to be long-lasting with fathers in receipt of Parental Allowance later spending more time with their children and sharing family work more equally with their partners. One in four of the fathers on Parental Allowance later reduced their paid working hours. The impact on mothers has been their earlier return to the labour market and increase in their paid working hours. However, there are significant regional differences in these figures.

Parental Allowance Plus (PAP) and the Partnership Bonus were introduced in 2015 to enable flexibility in combining part-time work with Parental Allowance. Parental Allowance Plus aims to reduce time spent out of the labour market and supports parents who return to work earlier. They can combine part-time work and receive PAP. The allowance is calculated as per the basic Parental Allowance but is paid at half the amount and is capped at 900 Euro with a minimum of 150 Euro. It is provided for a total of 24 months. In the fourth quarter of 2016, 22.7% of parents opted for PAP. The Partnership Bonus aims at promoting a more equal sharing of care work. Four additional months of Parental Allowance are paid in parallel to both parents who decide to work part-time between 25 and 30 hours a week.

It is obligatory for employers to enable the part-time regime of those taking up the allowance and to offer the full-time regime to those returning after taking up the
allowance. Legislation is currently under consideration to establish a broader right to move from the part-time regime to the full-time regime at work.

A 2017 evaluation of Parental Allowance Plus interviewed parents and found that 17% of fathers would not have reduced or interrupted their paid working hours if PAP was not available. 52% of parents in receipt of the Partnership Bonus report that they share family work. 84% of parents described their economic situation while receiving PAP as good or very good.

The allowance is tax-based and the overall budget for 2019 for this allowance is 7 billion Euros. The costs of the benefit are paid at the federal level (“Länder”), the costs of implementation are paid at the state level. The allowance takes into consideration the diversity of families. For instance, single parents can take the full leave period available to both partners. Same sex partners who are parenting can benefit from the allowance. Separated parents who are sharing the care work and adoptive parents can also avail of the allowance. The allowance is paid to employees, self-employed persons, unemployed persons, and student parents.

Dissemination of the policy is by means of leaflets, publications, a telephone hotline, and a family guide website run by the Ministry (www.Familien-Wegweiser.de). Parents can use a calculator to explore different options for take-up of Parental Allowance, PAP and the Partnership bonus and their income implications.

1.3 Assessment of the good practice

The core assumption underlying this good practice is that parental leave can be a door opener for a more equal sharing of paid and unpaid work and long-term paternal involvement in family work. The starting point is the persistent gap between preference and reality with some 60% of parents with children aged under three years stating a preference for more equal sharing of family work and paid work, but much fewer able to realise this preference.

Research has shown that the time after the birth is a critical moment given the intensity of care work required and the potential for temporary roles assumed at this point to determine or at least strongly influence the long-term patterns of childcare by parents. This suggests that it is a moment of opportunity for a more equal sharing of family work. Father-specific leave has a positive impact and fathers who take parental leave are more actively involved in childcare afterwards. The 2017 Family Report found that more than 58% of fathers who took three or more months of parental leave state they now divide care work more equally with their partner.

Key enabling factors in this regard are identified as the length of leave, the father taking leave alone, and the father being on full-time leave. The majority of fathers (72%) who take Parental Allowance only claim the minimum two months leave. The PAP take-up has developed positively. Fathers who take this option have continued at reduced paid working hours for an average of 8.2 months so their length of leave is increased. However, there is a trade-off given the importance of being on full-time leave. The actual division of labour between partners is best under the Partnership Bonus with 82% of parents saying the mother does half of the care work. However, only 2% of parents opt for this option. Under the basic Parental Allowance and PAP, more than 60% of parents say that the mother takes on almost all the childcare.

It would be helpful to increase the length of leave of the father by increasing the number of non-transferable months. The importance of the father taking leave alone
could be addressed by reducing the number of months that both partners can take in parallel. In the first months it might be good to be together and time together at points of overlap are useful, but beyond this, time alone is decisive for the father to act in a primary carer role. There is a challenge to support full-time leave in the context of an allowance, which aims at making leave more flexible and seeks to motivate fathers to take up this leave.

This good practice faces four key challenges. First, parents need to be in a particular economic situation to share the leave. The income related benefit suits those who are better off. The replacement income for those on low income might not be adequate. Secondly, there are contradictory incentives available in other policy areas, the most notable being the tax splitting system that favours the male breadwinner model and the limited high-quality childcare infrastructure which has started to improve only recently. Thirdly, there is a need to change norms. Financial allowances are a good starting point but there is still a lot of work to be done for culture change. 40% of the German population is still of the opinion that mothers can better take care of children than fathers. Finally, the flexibility of the allowance, so important in dealing with diverse personal circumstances, means that it is complex and there is a challenge to ensure it is adequately and accurately communicated.

2. The situation in the other participating countries

The starting point for sharing perspectives and experiences among the participating countries was that paternity leave has a particular role in enabling an immediate, early and timely bonding between father and child. While this is a key foundation, it is parental leave that plays a central role in enabling long-term paternal involvement in family work. In presenting Member State experiences and approaches, a number of key factors are evident in seeking this longer-term outcome. These included: non-transferability, compensation, and flexibility. Each factor is considered in turn below with examples from participating countries.

The non-transferability of leave is valuable in providing fathers with a case to make at work for taking leave. It underpins a more positive discussion between couples on managing family work. In 2000, Iceland provided for parental leave to be available for 3 months for the mother, 3 months for the father, and 3 months to be shared. The leave is well paid and non-transferable. Mothers have to take leave for the first three weeks. Parents have to use the leave within 2 years. This is because extending the leave over a longer period does not enable fathers to engage as primary carers at an early age. There is flexibility in how parents use the leave, once an agreement is reached with the employer. The policy is aimed at influencing the role of fathers in the home, ensuring that the care of children is provided by both parents, enabling women and men to coordinate work in and out of the home, and changing employer attitudes. The uptake in 2001 was 82.4% of fathers, with 14.5% using more than three months, and 88.5% in 2007, with 21.2% fathers taking more than the three months. Research has shown that the division of care work during the period from birth up to 3 years old is more equal in Iceland since the introduction of these policies. The active father is seen as the norm in masculinity models.

1 For more information on the situation in the participating countries, please refer to the country papers for this seminar, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/mlp-gender-equality-seminar-long-term-paternal-involvement-family-work_en
In **Sweden**, normative support is apparent alongside institutional support. Each parent has access to 240 days parental leave until the child is 12 years old. Of these, 90 days are non-transferable. The leave is well paid at 77.6% of earnings for the first 195 days and a flat rate for 45 days. Parents can transfer leave days to each other on the basis of consent forms. The reserved months increased uptake among men and on average men use up to 106 days, above the restricted level. However, men are more likely to take the leave in the second year, with only half using it in the first year. Research has identified that only 13% of heterosexual couples share parental pay equally in years 0-2. Fathers on low-income, with low educational status or with a migrant background are less likely to take leave. Double days can be taken by parents for the purpose of being on leave together when the child is young. While not popular because it takes up two days of the overall allowance, this possibility is used more by those with low incomes.

In **Estonia**, there is a generous income-related system of parental level. However, mothers account for over 90% of those taking up this leave. Reform work is ongoing in this policy area and one of the policy proposals is to make 30 days of the parental benefit non-transferable to be taken separately or in parallel with the mother from 2020.

The importance of fathers being on leave and caring for children on their own was emphasised. This enables fathers to take on the role of primary carers. In **Portugal**, if fathers take at least 30 consecutive days or two periods of 15 consecutive days of the initial parental leave during the period of 120 (100% compensation)/150 (80% compensation) days they can access an ‘initial parental leave with bonus’ of an additional 30 days of leave. This was introduced to encourage fathers to do care work alone and to assist mothers to return to the labour market. In **Finland**, fathers have 9 weeks non-transferable paid paternity/paternal leave. Up to 18 days can be spent concurrently with the mother with the whole 9 weeks to be used before the child is 2 years old. It is noteworthy that 80% of fathers take the 3 weeks together with the mother and over 50% of fathers take the further 6 weeks they are entitled to. Longer term paternal leave is more likely to be taken up by fathers with a higher level of educational status and whose spouses also have a higher level of educational status.

The timing and length of this leave is also seen as important. A Family Bonus is provided in **Austria** since 2017 consisting of one month of leave for fathers after the birth of the child, to be taken within the first 91 days after the birth of the child. This is to enable fathers to be at home early in the life of the child and to develop a close bond. A fixed allowance of 700 Euros is payable, which is deducted from any childcare allowance paid. Agreement with the employer is needed to take this leave and there is no dismissal protection. The Austrian experience was also seen as pointing to the need for longer non-transferable leaves. The Austrian model is similar to the German model. However, there is also a low take up by fathers beyond the 2 months, which is required where parents are deemed to be sharing take-up. The two months are seen by fathers in a rather limiting way as ‘my two months’. Thus, they often do not consider extending their leave beyond those two months.

The internal family economy and the external economic context for the family were seen by seminar participants as important factors to consider as regards fathers' long-term involvement in family work. **Compensation paid during the leave** is important. In **Iceland**, compensation stands at 80% of the parent's income. Anything lower is seen to be problematic. A ceiling on the payment was introduced during the economic crisis and the days taken by men, while still relatively high, dropped. In **Belgium**, paternity leave of 10 days is paid at 100% for the first three days by the employer and
82% under the health insurance scheme for the remaining 7 days. The vast majority of fathers take this leave. It is not compulsory but that is seen as the next step as it makes it easier for fathers to claim it from their employers.

Conversely, in Cyprus there are 18 weeks of unpaid parental leave provided per parent until the child is 8 years old. The employer has to agree to the person taking the leave. Very few men take this leave, even though social insurance credits are paid. In Italy, parental leave includes individual non-transferable leave for the father. However, there is a very low take-up. The compensation is at 30% and it is clear that the non-transferability of leave is not enough on its own to secure paternal involvement. In France, the 2015 reform of parental leave extended the ‘father’s quota’ to six months and made the allowance income-related. However, the allowance was far too low and take-up by fathers has stalled and stood at 4.4% in 2016. In Malta, parental leave is unpaid and, during 2016, 495 women and only 3 men took parental leave in the public sector; while a further 247 women and only 5 men took a career break. The Czech Republic has one of the highest gender pay gaps and differences in employment rates of men and women, and one of the most limited levels of access to childcare services. In such a context, incentives are lacking and in 2017 men were only 1.8% of those in receipt of parental allowances.

The design of parental leave can lead to unintended consequences due to the economic rationales they establish. Parental leave in Lithuania allows a parent to choose either one year of fully paid child care leave without the possibility to work or two years leave with the possibility for part-time work during the second year of leave, with social benefits at 70% of compensated salary in the first year, and 40% in the second year. Most often, couples choose the two-year scheme with the possibility to work in the second year and to receive 40% parental allowance. Though women still dominate in taking parental leave under the two-year scheme, more men take parental leave in the second year. Research shows that when a couple decides that a father will take parental leave in the second year it is because his salary is higher. He will continue working full time and will not take on caring duties. The mother will undertake the child-caring commitments and move out of active employment, thus underpinning a male-breadwinner model.

Part of the reform process in Estonia has included proposals for further flexibility in terms of more options to combine parental leave benefit and work. This is framed as allowing parents to keep their careers on track. Since 2018, a parent may receive income from work at a level up to half of the upper level of the parental benefit without the benefit reduction. The non-transferable leave system in Belgium of each parent having 4 months includes the possibility of taking the leave full-time or part-time. Women form 70% of those taking up the leave. Where parental leave is taken at the 20% rate, 40% of fathers are taking it up. Where parental leave is taken at the 50% rate, only 17% of fathers are taking it up. Flexibility has a role to play, although there is a trade-off noted in terms of the need for full-time care by the father in order to play the primary carer role.

Issues of norms, eligibility, and fathers’ involvement in seeking change were also noted in the discussion.

Norms were seen as limiting the extent to which care was valued in society and the manner in which work in the caring professions was valued. The UK pointed to the need to promote care as a value. Childcare is invisible, hard and lonely and needs to be valued. Norms about mothers that paediatricians and educators often promote can also be problematic.
In Poland, parental leave can be shared but there was only 1% take-up by men in 2017. It is perceived as a mother’s right. Mothers themselves don’t want to share it and see it as their right. Employers don’t understand that fathers can be on parental leave. In Romania, there is 85% payment for parental leave and a fixed non-transferable month for the father. Take up is poor with only 2.8% of fathers taking this month in 2014. Men feel penalised if they take the leave. Employers and the public don’t know about the leave policy. In Slovenia, there was a draft law to make one month of the parental leave into a father’s leave. There was a strong negative reaction from women and suggestions that this would deprive the child of care. It was withdrawn and replaced by one month of fully paid paternity leave. 80% fathers are taking this compensated leave.

Public campaigns have been pursued in the Netherlands. These have focused on stimulating explicit decision-making by parents on the division of labour at the point of childbirth and on stimulating work-life balance in the workplace. There is a tax break to encourage the second earner to work hours outside of the home but people are not aware of the actual benefits of such a measure and a tool was developed and promoted to help show the fiscal gains for parents. In Italy, a campaign for cultural change, ‘Let’s give voice to fathers’ was organised. It involved a national public opinion survey, social media, videos and radio slots. It sought to encourage fathers to use parental leave. In Malta, the value of the campaigns done was questioned in a context where the division of labour was so ingrained and the organisation of family had not caught up with developments in the organisation of work on the labour market.

Eligibility barriers were noted in UK research. The take up of leaves can be skewed by eligibility issues when not all parents are covered. The UK research showed that only some 75% of potential parents were covered. Issues of citizenship, residency, and employment history affected eligibility.

It was noted that very few fathers are seeking to improve their rights in terms of parental leaves. The absence of men in the political debate and the wider popular debate about this issue is problematic. It would be important to generate a demand from fathers. The example of the ‘Visible Fathers’ campaign in Finland was given. However, more widely it was felt that fathers only get interested in these issues when it comes to custody matters. It was also emphasised that there is a need to communicate children’s voices in this debate. There is a strong children’s rights dimension to the issue and access to both parents as carers has a positive impact on the mental development of the child.

3. Key issues discussed during the seminar

Long-term paternal involvement needs to be communicated and viewed as an investment not an expense. Paternity leave and parental leave and the long-term paternal involvement they enable are important for a wide range of reasons. They contribute to improved work experience, child development, relationship stability, and fertility rates. This is seen as a broad issue and it is not seen as tenable that women should carry the full cost of having children and creating future generations.

All Member States, despite their different legislation, funding, and entitlements, were seen as still battling a common issue of unhelpful social and cultural norms about what it means to be a mother, a father, a woman, and a man. Three lines of response to these norms were identified: Masculinisation of childcare to make it attractive;
Childcare incorporated into masculinity; and degendering childcare. The latter was seen as particularly useful. It is premised on the need to look at the issue from the child’s perspective - the child’s need for close bonds to all possible carers.

These social norms were identified as motivating opposition to the introduction of measures to foster long-term paternal involvement in family work and diminishing political will in this regard. They were identified as shaping the take-up of and the manner in which entitlements were taken up by men and the manner in which taking on such roles were justified by men. Slovenian research was cited, which identified that many fathers see their role as playing with their children and helping the mother rather than as a primary carer.

These norms were seen as influencing the perspective of mothers in relation to sharing leave entitlements with their partners. The same Slovenian research identified that mothers felt their partner was not sufficiently capable. French research that was referenced found that even in families where the father and the mother earn a similar salary, it was usually the mother who took up the leave. Choices get made out of gendered histories and contexts. Norms matter in this debate.

There was general agreement that the introduction of legislation and the provision of funding and entitlements to paternity and parental leave influenced behaviour and was the most important factor in contributing to changing these unhelpful social norms. There is a key role for family policy in changing such norms by creating a structure of opportunities for new behaviours to be demonstrated. However, decisions can equally be limited by the nature of the opportunities provided. Care is needed in their formulation and family policy-making expertise must be connected with gender equality policy-making expertise to ensure such care. The situation in Lithuania was noted where a Parliamentary proposal was made that the entitlement would be opened up to grand parents, thus undermining the establishment of new norms around fathers. It was suggested that there needs to be a continuous articulation of the father’s identity as a father throughout his lifetime and policy incentives are also required for this.

A contradiction was noted between the compulsion on mothers to take up a certain number of weeks of maternity leave in some jurisdictions and the absence of any compulsion on fathers. Portugal presented as one of the few examples of compulsion on fathers evidenced in their practice of fifteen days compulsory paternity leave coupled with ten days of optional leave. In Italy, paternity leave of 1 day is compulsory. It was noted that compulsion in relation to maternity leave was a health and safety issue for the mother. However, the variations in the length of this compulsory period suggested that this did not fully explain or resolve this contradiction, a variety including eight compulsory weeks maternity leave in Germany, four weeks in Portugal and two weeks in Sweden. Compulsory paternity leave was deemed to be strongly counter normative. It was hard for participants to envisage it happening. Government must find a balance between giving options and fostering change.

Given that change in structures and systems needs a supportive cultural context, concrete actions addressing norms, rather than just waiting for new structures and systems to make their mark, was promoted as useful. Popular, political and media discourse on paternal involvement needs to be influenced to focus on active and capable fathers. A change in societal values needs to be pushed and stereotypes need to be challenged. The importance of role models, public education campaigns, and ‘pop-culture’ artefacts were suggested. The value of economic nudges to
influence behaviour and attitudes was highlighted. The field of behavioural economics can contribute to thinking in this regard. The marketing of parenting related leave was seen as relevant. It might best be marketed as a child's right and identified as childcare leave. Overall, it was felt that culture matters but should not be overestimated.

Change in long-term paternal involvement and in realising the full potential in leave arrangement was seen to be influenced by change in wider systems. These include the workplace, childcare infrastructure, and the wider policy context.

There was general concern at the perspective of employers on paternal involvement and their expectations of fathers in the workplace. This leads to reluctance among fathers in taking up leave entitlements and fear for their future careers. Workplace conditions were also seen as influencing women's choices. The need to ensure employers were well informed and action on employer awareness were noted as useful. The question of who pays for the leave is seen as influencing employer attitudes, with less negativity where payment is out of the public purse or insurance contributions. Women were also seen as choosing leave, including in preference to their partners, to escape their jobs, often with low pay and poor working conditions. Contexts of high unemployment were also influential in the ability of parents to take up their entitlements with any confidence. Sick leave policies were furthermore noted as being relevant and important to paternal involvement.

Flexible working is always going to be problematic for paternal involvement if it is only women that take up these arrangements. Both parents need to take up such opportunities and this was acknowledged as one of the aims of PAP in Germany. However, the use of flexible working can be different between women and men. Women reduce hours by going home early. Men protect themselves by taking one day out of the office rather than being seen to leave early. Breaks for feeding the child were noted as important in enabling paternal involvement as primary carer. Employer costs associated with flexible working arrangements were also acknowledged as a barrier. The need for new models of part-time employment for parents was stressed. For long-term paternal involvement, mothers need to have more hours of paid work and fathers need to work less. Again, the PAP in Germany was noted as an example.

Childcare infrastructure was seen as particularly influential on paternal involvement over the long term. Limited availability, poor quality, and high costs of childcare services were identified as a significant barrier. Alongside this, it was noted that more value should be placed on these professions if unhelpful norms are to be addressed.

A range of policy fields from the wider policy context were identified as relevant. These included tax and insurance systems that needed to reflect partnership parenting. Tax splitting in Germany was given as one problematic example where earned income of one spouse is attributed to the other spouse for the purposes of assessing personal income tax which reduces the tax rate paid by the higher earner. Choices can be limited by income. Opportunities can be more available to the wealthy than to those living in poverty and on low incomes. Income policy and anti-poverty policies have a contribution to make. Finally, the relevance of school hours and school infrastructure was noted in terms of achieving work-life balance and enabling paternal involvement.

Finally, good communication on leave and allowance entitlements was noted as important in a context where flexibility is required in leave arrangements and flexibility inevitably is accompanied by complexity. There were suggestions to link in with other information providers: personalised services related to employability could extend to
parenthood, medical services could carry information materials, and birth registration services could do likewise, though this was considered to run the risk of being too late. It was noted that tax gains and pensions rights are difficult to communicate. Access to online calculators of both the immediate and long-term benefits on offer are required to capture and communicate these important elements.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

In their closing speech, the European Commission representatives pointed to four key instruments in the work-life balance package² and linked them to key issues raised in the discussions:

• Proposal for ten days paid paternity leave: This enables fathers to ‘see how it is’ in a caring role. It ‘names the players in the game’ with dedicated leave for fathers. It acknowledges ‘fathers as a resource’ for the family and for society. It reflects a ‘mutual duty’ of the father and the mother.

• Proposal for parental leave with two months non-transferable where one and a half months are compensated: This offers a ‘knock-on from paternity leave’ to enable longer-term paternal involvement. It takes on the concern for non-transferable leave and for compensation.

• Proposals for flexible working arrangements: This was less of a focus in the debate but the need to make these broadly accessible to both parents was articulated.

• Proposals for paid carers' leave: This was not a significant focus in the debate but, given demographic change, it is crucial as it is mainly women currently providing care required by older family members.

Finally, the importance of the protections from dismissal and discrimination in the Draft Directive was noted as responding to the fear of taking up entitlements that had been referred to in the discussions.

In summary, three main messages emerged from the discussions:

• Rather than seeing well-paid leave for men and women as too expensive, it needed to be seen as an investment rather than a cost - a thriving society needs a gender equality infrastructure.

• There is a need to frame issues of paternal involvement as part of the rights of the child to have both parents engaged as carers, to avoid any framing it in terms of women losing rights or men having to take on more responsibility.

• New legislation and entitlements can challenge norms and stereotypes. Starting with legal action may encourage cultural change to follow.

² For more information, see: http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1311&langId=en