



Peer Review on “The financial impact of maternity and paternity leave”

Czech Republic, 8 – 9 October 2018

Peer Country Commenting Paper - Germany

How parental leave reforms have contributed to more “active” fathers and more working mothers - and how they pay off

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

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1 Introduction

This paper has been prepared for the Peer Review on "The financial impact of maternity and paternity leave". It provides a comparative assessment of the policy example of the Host Country and the situation in Germany. For information on the host country policy example, please refer to the Host Country Discussion Paper.

2 Situation in the peer country

Over the last years mothers' labour market participation in Germany has increased significantly and dual-earner households have become commonplace. From 2006 to 2016 the number of mothers in work rose from 60 to 67%, respectively from 47 % to 54 % for mothers with a youngest child under 8 years (BMFSFJ 2018a). The number of dual-earner households rose from 60% in 2008 to 66% in 2016; the number of couples with both partners working full-time increased from 9 % in 2008 to 14 % in 2016 (Destatis 2017). However, there are persisting gender gaps, indicating that mothers are still a long way off achieving full labour market participation and economic independence. Unlike in the Czech Republic, part-time jobs are offered by many companies and part-time work has been and still is common for women in Germany, with more than two thirds of working mothers (compared to only every tenth father) in part-time arrangements. Accordingly, the average within couple gender gap in paid working hours is (at 25 hours per week) wider than in many other OECD countries and the average contribution of mothers to household income is lower in Germany than it is in most of the OECD (OECD 2016). One of the main reasons for this is that time for employment and time for family work are unequally distributed between mothers and fathers. The birth of a child plays a significant role here, as it often – although contrary to parents' wishes – leads to a traditional division of work and family responsibilities that is kept up for years, impacting women's employability. Until quite recently it was – similar to the Czech Republic – common for mothers in Germany to take up parental leave (resp. the former child-raising allowance) and leave their jobs for at least three years after childbirth. Staying out of the labour market even longer and/or working a classic part-time job (19,25 hours) for years was not unusual for many.

The changes in mothers' employability described above have been stimulated by a significant policy shift in the last decade. The new policy approach moved away from fostering the male bread winner model towards aiming at supporting equal sharing in reconciling family and working life (OECD, 2016). The policy shift was driven not only by more "modern" attitudes towards e.g. mothers' employment and participation of very young children in early childhood education and care (ECEC), but also by low fertility rates and the necessity to keep highly educated women in the labour market. Above all, family policy had to acknowledge and answer to changed realities and wishes of young highly educated and aspiring mothers as well as to young, more family-oriented fathers (OECD, 2016).

The shift in Germany's family policy is reflected in the parental leave reform, as well as, in great investments in early childhood education and care support. In 2007, a new parental leave system, parental allowance (*Elterngeld*), was introduced. It aimed at supporting parents financially during the first year after childbirth and – through a "daddy quota" – in sharing childcare responsibilities more equally between partners. Before, the so called „child-raising allowance“ promoted a family model with the father as main earner in the family and the mother being mainly responsible for taking care of the child. Parental Allowance addressed, for the first time, fathers and encouraged their involvement in childcare responsibilities. It also aimed at promoting mothers' earlier return to the labour market.

Around the same time, federal, regional and local governments decided, that by 2013, 35 % of children under three years old should have a public **ECEC place** in order to support parents' return to work after parental allowance ended and invested in

expanding childcare services (Childcare Funding Act in 2008). Since 2013 children at the age of one have a legal right to ECEC.

Also, the Federal Ministry for Family affairs started an initiative to sensitize and engage businesses for the issue of family-friendliness in corporate culture: the "Business Programme: Success Factor Family". It established a network of companies sharing good practices, guidelines and bringing the benefits of family-friendly corporate culture to the public's attention by competitions and conferences.

In 2015, as parents' realities and wishes with regard to reconciling work and family-life had undergone changes, that were fed in part by the 2007 reform: In order to better support parents' striving for equality in their relationships parental allowance plus (PAP, *Elterngeld Plus*) was introduced, allowing parents to stretch the entitlement period while receiving a smaller benefit. The reform again supported equal sharing between parents by granting a "partnership bonus" (four additional months of the benefit) to parents who both worked reduced hours and took on childcare responsibilities.

In 2016, there were 1.64 million recipients of basic parental allowance and 1.2 million parents had chosen to apply for the new *parental allowance plus*.

3 Assessment of the policy measure

In the following section, the parental leave scheme, encompassing the three components *parental allowance*, *parental allowance plus* and *the partnership bonus*, which parents can either combine or choose between (since 2015), are presented as a comparative example and as a policy scheme that effectively enhances fathers' involvement in care responsibilities and mothers' labour market participation.

3.1 The German Parental Allowance Scheme

The **basic parental allowance** (*Elterngeld*) (introduced in 2007) grants parents a leave benefit for 12 months. An additional two months are offered, if both parents participate in the uptake of parental allowance with each parent taking up at least two months of parental leave (non-transferable months, sometimes titled "daddy's quota"). The benefit is granted at 67 percent (now 65%), with a ceiling of EUR 1 800 and a floor of EUR 300.

When introducing the parental allowance, the federal government aimed at three major objectives:

1. Reducing the economic risks of having a child (when one parent stays home and loses income), by ensuring more financial stability,
2. supporting the long-term economic independence of both parents and boosting female employment by setting incentives for mothers to return to the labour market soon after giving birth,
3. motivating and encouraging fathers to stay at home for and care for their new-born from an early stage on (Deutscher Bundestag 2006).

The **parental allowance plus** ("PAP"; *Elterngeld Plus*) and the, **partnership bonus** (*Partnerschaftsbonus*) introduced in 2015 build upon the basic parental allowance.

For parents who earn no income after the birth of their child, the "PAP" amount is half the basic parental allowance amount and simply extends the payment period. If parents decide to work part-time up to 30 hours per week, the "PAP" amount can be the same as the basic parental allowance amount would be, yet parents can receive "PAP" for up to twice as long. The total amount paid to them is significantly higher with "PAP", than with basic parental allowance. (Previously, parents working part-time received less in total than those who ceased working entirely).

By doubling the duration of the parental allowance for parents who work part-time and by granting a bonus for those who simultaneously work between 25 and 30 hours per

week (thus also sharing childcare responsibilities), the "PAP" introduced financial incentives that encouraged equal sharing. The instruments also allow for more flexibility in reconciling work and family-life. Since 2015, parents can either choose between or combine the three components.

3.2 "Active" fathers and working mothers in Germany today

3.2.1 Fathers taking parental leave

Unlike in the Czech Republic, taking parental leave has become more common for fathers in Germany, as it has become more common for mothers to return to their job earlier after childbirth and working more hours. A year after parental allowance was introduced, one in five entitled fathers have claimed the benefit (21 %) and their numbers have been increasing ever since, with the national average reaching 36 % in 2015 and, in some regions, even up to 57 % (BMFSFJ 2018 b). Since the introduction of *parental allowance plus* (PAP) (in 2015), the number of parents claiming this new benefit has almost doubled, the number of fathers more than tripled. Currently, fathers claim parental allowance for longer periods, those claiming *parental allowance plus* receive the benefit with an average of 8.5 months. 47 % of fathers who applied for parental allowance plus also opted for the *partnership bonus*, further extending the allowance.

3.2.2 Mothers with young children in the job market

Currently, women return to work after the birth of a child much earlier than they did ten years ago and, in addition, they have expanded their working hours. While in 2006 only 41 % of working mothers, whose youngest child was two years old, were back in their job, it was 57 % in 2016. Moreover, the share of those in part-time jobs with a medium to high number of working hours per week (20-28 and 28-36 hrs) has doubled (BMFSFJ 2018 a). Relating to the possibility of gaining an income above the poverty line, the volume of working hours is particularly critical when working part-time. Correspondingly, the share of working mothers who manage to gain a minimum living wage has risen significantly.

3.2.3 Changing attitudes in society

German society today sees the trend of fathers wanting to assume more responsibility for the family as a positive thing: 82 % of people over 16-year-old, think it is good that more fathers use parental allowance to reduce working hours or take a longer break from work in order to look after their children. Only eight percent rejected the idea. In 2016, only one percent of people born between 1973 and 1992 were against the idea of fathers taking parental leave. This shows that a social norm has been established according to which it is acceptable for fathers to take parental leave. More than 80% of the population are now in favour of state benefits for fathers (BMFSFJ 2018 a).

Also, attitudes towards working mothers with very young children have become more "modern" in West Germany, in spite of its more traditional gender norms. This is reflected also in a change in the perception and attitude in favour of a family policy approach that defines reconciliation of work and family as an issue both for mothers and for fathers. Some 53 % of the population overall and 61 % of parents with under-age children think that family policy should improve conditions for parents so that both parents can work (BMFSFJ 2018 a).

3.3 The role of family policy in involving fathers, supporting mothers and promoting equal sharing in families

The above-mentioned changes in how parents share responsibilities and time for children and work, and in values and attitudes towards mothers and fathers throughout society, are confirmed to have been decisively promoted by family policy.

While it is clear that the **parental allowance** scheme has contributed to these changes, that cannot be seen or identified as the only reason or factor for this change. Surely,

the ongoing investments to expand childcare services, that accompanied the parental leave reform, played and still play a major role in enabling mothers to return earlier to their jobs. Since 1 August 2013, parents have the legal right to receive a **childcare** place for all their children (once they reach 1 year old). Today, about a third of the children under three years old are cared for in childcare facilities or day-care centres and demands keep increasing. There are continuous efforts and ongoing investments by federal government. From next year on a total of EUR 5.5 billion will be made available to regional states by 2022, for more childcare places, for higher quality of care and less costs for parents. Also, widely available part-time work, especially for mothers, as well as continuous efforts for more **family-friendly work places** are prerequisites for parents to reconcile work and family according to their needs and take up parental leave. The Success Factor Family network (part of the "Business Programme" mentioned in section 2) jointly launched in 2006 by the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs and the German Chamber of Industry and Commerce has become the country's largest corporate network (around 6 900 members) providing employers with information and points of contact on the topic of reconciling family and working life. There has been a considerable rise in the number of companies that believe family-friendly policies are important (from 47 %t in 2003 to 77 % in 2016) and quality of family-friendly measures in companies has increased (BMFSFJ 2018a).

3.3.1 Impact of the parental allowance scheme (Parental allowance /Plus, Partnership bonus)

Evaluation studies have shown, that the parental allowance helps mothers return to work earlier and expand their weekly working hours, leads to more fathers spending more time with their children and contributes to economic stability of families (Prognos AG 2014, Huebener et. al. 2016).

Fathers who claim the parental allowance are shown to **spend more time with their children** and develop closer bonds with them. An evaluation study of parental allowance found that fathers claiming the leave benefit on average spent seven hours with their child during a working day, compared to three hours for fathers not claiming parental allowance (BMFSFJ 2012). The effects of parental allowance on fathers are proven to be lasting and to remain beyond the period of parental leave. On average, fathers who return to work after taking parental leave spend an hour longer with their children every day compared to before their period of parental leave. They also share family-related work more equally with their partner, even years later (Bünning 2016, Schober/Zoch 2015).

The desire among fathers to assume responsibility for looking after their children and performing family-related tasks has become something of a social trend. Significantly more than 50 % of fathers would like to take on at least half of childcare responsibilities. Some 79 % of fathers would like to have more family time and are willing to reduce their working hours as a result (BMFSFJ 2018b).

Fathers who take parental leave support their partners' return to work. Among **mothers** whose partner is on parental leave, twice as many are employed during that time compared with mothers whose partners are not on parental leave (BMFSFJ 2018a). While mothers with under one-year-olds stay at home more often than before the introduction of parental allowance, mothers with two-year-olds are and especially those with lower income are now returning earlier (Huebner et. al. 2016). Shortened employment interruptions are linked to better wages and promotion opportunities and, thus, are likely to improve mothers' labour market careers in the long run, as well as their protection from poverty risks.

With more working mothers, additional income is earned, and **families** with two earners are **better protected of poverty risks**. Also, it leads to increases in tax revenues and mandatory social insurance contributions and to a drop in social transfers. Families are best protected against poverty risks, when both parents work. Around two-thirds of children in households with no income from paid work are at risk of poverty. If at least

one parent works full-time, the risk of poverty drops to 15 %. If the family has a second income from part-time employment, it has a five percent poverty risk (BMFSFJ 2018a).

Calculations show, that if policymakers acted on parents' wishes and assisted them by providing suitable family-related benefits, employment figures and the number of working hours could be increased by 2030, thus leading to a gross domestic product some EUR 70 billion higher (BMFSFJ 2018a, Prognos AG 2016, Zukunftsreport Familie 2030). The fact, that targeted design of family-related benefits can further improve growth and employment in Germany, and refinancing effects can positively impact public finances has been acknowledged by the Federal Ministry of Finance (BMF 2016).

4 Assessment of success factors and transferability

Experience from Germany not only shows, that by designing policy instruments such as parental leave / parental allowance, fathers' involvement in caring responsibilities can be encouraged and promoted, but also, that it pays off – for themselves, their partners and also for society and the economy (OECD 2016, BMFSFJ 2018a).

To what extent the policy instruments presented here are transferable to the Czech Republic cannot be predicted in detail. However, drawing from the information provided in the host country paper and from experience in Germany, it seems right and crucial to focus on expanding childcare services as children still need to be cared for after parental allowances end. Promoting fathers' involvement, e.g. by a motivational bonus, is certainly advisable in order to support mothers in their careers. It is also recommended to put efforts in measures, addressing companies and sensitising them for the need (and remuneration) of improving work-life-balance for parents, so that parents are continuously able to reconcile work and family life over the life-course.

4.1 Addressing fathers

Designing parental leave allowances in a way, that fathers are clearly addressed in their responsibility for the family surely is a success factor. The "daddy quota" in German parental allowance, providing two partner months that are available to the family only if both parents take parental leave, has proven to be an incentive for fathers (only around 3,5 % of fathers took up child-raising allowance in 2006). Another is the relatively high ceiling of the benefit and the fact, that the earnings replacement component is based on each partner's income before birth and replaces 65 % of the income-loss.

Many fathers rather wish to reduce working hours than to fully leave their jobs for a longer period of time. Parental Allowance Plus is more attractive for them, as well as for mothers who wish to return to work part-time soon after the birth of their child. They can receive the leave benefit for longer and can thus, better combine taking care of their young child and their job requirements. PAP, and the partnership bonus especially, promote equal division of caring for a child to a larger extend than the basic parental allowance and the bonus, although used only by very few parents yet, being especially appreciated by fathers (Deutscher Bundestag 2018). Parents also appreciate that the flexibility of the three components (parental allowance, PAP and Partnership bonus) allows them to reduce working hours or to leave their job in order to care for their young child and share responsibilities with their partner. Parental allowance enables parents to find solutions for their specific situation.

4.2 Supporting equal sharing

The parental leave scheme supports equal sharing for mothers and fathers – by making clear that both parents can and should take up the parental allowance. If one partner claims at least two months of parental allowance, the period for receiving the benefit is extended from 12 to 14 months ("**daddy quota**").

The **partnership bonus** rewards equal sharing of time for work and caring for children by granting additional four months of the benefit if both parents simultaneously work

part-time (25-30 hours per week) over a period of four months. The fact, parents share caring responsibilities to a larger extent when receiving parental allowance plus (compared to the basic parental allowance), and most equally, when receiving the partnership bonus, underlines that the instruments are effective in supporting parents in their wishes to share caring more equally (Deutscher Bundestag 2018).

4.3 The role of evaluation

Evaluation is crucial to convey the benefits of the policy instruments introduced and to refine measures continuously according to parents' needs and wishes. It also helps to argue that the high costs for parental allowance pay off (e.g. in tax increases, see above). Furthermore, evaluating the effects of policy instruments in place, is the precondition to make further adaptations in order to attain higher efficiency and prevent outcomes not wished for.

Parental allowance is one of the best-known family-related benefits in Germany, and some eight million people have claimed it since its introduction 10 years ago. Both family research and opinion polls say that parental allowance has quickly become symbolic of a successful family policy focusing on the realities and desires of young parents. As a result, the policy is very popular with them. The evaluation of the relatively new Parental Allowance Plus and Partnership bonus found them to be just as popular as parental allowance was when it was introduced.

5 Questions

- Is it possible to reduce working time while receiving parental allowance or is leaving the job a precondition? How are fathers/families with lower income taken into account? Is there a higher compensation rate for them?
- What exactly is the motivational alternating bonus, how does it work? Is it granted in addition to parental allowance? Is it similar to a daddy quota?
- Are there other initiatives or measures aiming at companies (ongoing or planned, other than the foreseen job-sharing) in order to obtain better conditions for mothers and fathers to reconcile family life and work?

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Annex 1 Summary table

The main points covered by the paper are summarised below.

Situation in the peer country

- The birth of a child plays a significant role as it often leads to a traditional division of work and family responsibilities – impacting women's employment significantly: more than two thirds of working mothers are in part-time jobs.
- **In the last decade German family policy shifted towards supporting an equal sharing of work and family responsibilities** in reconciling family and working life – thus also answering to the gap between parents' ideal and lived pattern of reconciliation.
- In 2007, the *Elterngeld*, **parental allowance**, was introduced, granting parental leave benefit for up to 14 months (12 + 2, if at least two months were taken up by the other parent). At the same time, great investments in expanding childcare facilities were undertaken.
- In 2015, parental allowance saw another reform: **parental allowance plus** (PAP, *Elterngeld Plus*) was introduced, allowing parents working part-time to stretch the entitlement period while receiving a smaller benefit.

Assessment of the policy measure

- Parental leave reforms have led to more fathers engaging in spending time with their young children and to mothers re-entering jobs earlier and, while still working part-time, extending working hours.
- **Today, more than one-third of the fathers** (in some regions, even more than every second father) **take up parental leave** (reducing working hours or exiting their jobs for a limited amount of time). Those claiming *parental allowance plus* receive the benefit with an average of 8.5 months and, thus, for invariably longer periods.
- **In 2016, 57% of working mothers were back at work, when the (youngest) child was 2 years old** – compared to 41% before the introduction of parental allowance; the share of those working close to full-time having more than doubled.
- **Parental leave reforms have changed attitudes towards gender roles in society**: today it is more accepted for fathers to take parental leave as it is for mothers to work while children are still young; there is support (and demands) for a policy approach addressing mothers and fathers in reconciling work and family life.

Assessment of success factors and transferability

- Experience from Germany shows that parental leave can encourage and promote fathers' involvement in caring responsibilities, mothers' labour market participation and gender equality in society.
- The **daddy quota, the possibility to reduce working hours** (as well as to fully exit their jobs) **and the high compensation rate** for income-loss in the parental leave reform of 2007 **were incentives for fathers** to engage in family life.
- Parental Allowance Plus and the partnership bonus lead parents to share time spent at work, and thus also the time they spend with their child, more equally and therefore effectively support parents in their wishes for equal partnerships.

Questions

- How flexible is parental allowance in the Czech Republic in terms of exiting the job vs. reducing working hours?
- Is the motivational alternating bonus similar to a "daddy quota"? How does it work?
- Are there any initiatives / measures aiming at reaching better conditions for mothers and fathers to reconcile family and work (going beyond the planned "job-sharing legislation")?

Annex 2 Example of relevant practice

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|-------------------------|---|
| Name of the practice: | (Non-transferable) Partner months as part of the parental allowance scheme (Partnermonate im Elterngeld; "daddy quota") |
| Year of implementation: | 2007 |
| Coordinating authority: | Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth |
| Objectives: | The German parental allowance scheme aimed at providing parents and children more time with each other and also at promoting a more equal sharing of responsibilities in work and family life, so-called "Partnerschaftlichkeit". In order to achieve this goal, it offers partner months (2 additional months of payment). The partner months reward families where both parents participate in caring for the child, at least for a set time, especially encouraging fathers to participate in the up-take of parental leave. |
| Main activities: | The regular entitlement period of 12 months of parental allowance is extended to 14 months if the other parent also takes parental leave for at least two months (so-called "partner months"). Thus, families who make an effort to share work and family responsibilities more equally, are rewarded with additional parental allowance payments. |
| Results so far: | Before the partner months were introduced in 2007, only 3% of fathers stayed at home for some time, to take care of their child. By 2015, the number of fathers who participated in caring for their child had increased to more than ten times that: 36.5%. In recent years, fathers also take parental leave for longer than the formerly common two partner months, signalling a change in societal perception of a father's role in the family. They benefit by taking a more active role in rearing their children and creating stronger bonds with them, which also positively affects children's development. Mothers return to their workplaces more quickly, after the birth of their child and benefit from better financial stability. In 2015, the continuous trend among young parents in Germany (away from the father being the sole bread-winner, while the mother raises the children at home, towards an equal partnership in |

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| | <p>both, earning an income and rearing the children), has contributed to the introduction of an additional <i>partnership bonus</i> in the parental allowance scheme (ElterngeldPlus mit Partnerschaftsbonus):</p> <p>Parents who work part-time (between 25 and 30 hours per week) simultaneously during at least 4 months, are entitled to 4 additional parental allowance payments, each.</p> |
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