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Young Parents on Parental Leave in the Nordic Countries

Johanna Lammi-Taskula (ed.)

The pursuit of gender equality constitutes one of the main characteristics of the Nordic countries, both in the labour market and in the private sphere of family and care responsibilities. Parental leave policies that include non-transferable quotas for both mothers and fathers are central factor for this. The take-up and sharing of parental leave between parents is related to many socio-demographic aspects, including age. Having children at young age increases social risks in education and employment that have consequences also for the take-up of parental leave.

Although there is knowledge on the various economic and social risks related to young age, the possibilities and consequences of parental leave among young parents have not been widely studied. This report summarizes what is known about young parents' parental leave take-up in the Nordic countries as well as young peoples' values, hopes and perceptions regarding parenthood and its' different dimensions including the reconciliation of paid employment and childcare responsibilities.

In the report, the findings of a literature review are presented, looking at Nordic studies on young people's conceptions and expectations related to family life and parenthood, as well as various perspectives from each country on the practices in leave take-up of young parents. In addition, the report presents results of a comparative analysis on gender values among young adults, and comparative statistics from the Nordic countries on fertility, education and employment among young adults. Based on this overview, policy recommendations are formulated and research gaps identified around the topic of parenthood and leave policies for young people.

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Foreword

This study was initiated by the realization that although there is a lot of research on parental leave in the Nordic countries, as well as research on youth, the possibilities and consequences of parental leave among young adults have not been widely studied.

The report presents findings of previous Nordic studies on young people's conceptions and expectations related to family life and parenthood, and the practices in parental leave take-up of young parents. Relatively many relevant studies were found from Finland, Sweden, Iceland and Norway, but only some from Denmark. In addition to the literature review, the research team from Denmark also produced an empirical, comparative analysis of gender attitudes in the Nordic countries.

A warm thank you to the teams from all countries for the valuable contribution to the report! From each country, both senior and junior researchers participated in the project. The overview of previous research from Sweden was produced by Ann-Zofie Duvander and Marina Kullbrandt from Stockholm University; from Norway by Elin Kvande and Lisa Moen from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology; from Iceland by Guðný Björk Eydal, Ingólfur V. Gíslason and Ásdís A. Arnalds from the University of Iceland, and from Finland by Jenni Lahtinen, Finnish Youth Research Network. The overview from Denmark and the comparative analysis on gender attitudes was produced by Tine Rostgaard, Anders Ejrnaes and Trine Cosmus Nobel from Roskilde University. The comparative statistics on fertility, education and employment of young people in the Nordic countries were compiled and the final report edited by Johanna Lammi-Taskula, Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare.

In addition to an interesting overview on what is currently known about young parents and their parental leave take-up in the Nordic countries, the study also revealed many gaps in knowledge. New research in this area is needed in order to better understand and support parenthood, work-family reconciliation and gender equality among young adults.

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Abstract

Johanna Lammi-Taskula (ed.). *Young Parents on Parental Leave in the Nordic Countries*. Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL). Discussion paper 13/2022. 47 pages. Helsinki, Finland 2022. ISBN 978-952-343-849-1 (online publication)

The pursuit of gender equality constitutes one of the main characteristics of the Nordic countries, both in the labour market and in the private sphere of family and care responsibilities. Parental leave policies that include non-transferable quotas for both mothers and fathers are central factor for this. The take-up and sharing of parental leave between parents are related to many socio-demographic aspects, including age. Having children at young age increases social risks in education and employment that have consequences also for the take-up of parental leave.

Although there is knowledge on the various economic and social risks related to young age, the possibilities and consequences of parental leave among young parents have not been widely studied. This report summarizes what is known about young parents' parental leave take-up in the Nordic countries as well as young peoples' values, hopes and perceptions regarding parenthood and its' different dimensions including the reconciliation of paid employment and childcare responsibilities.

In the report, the findings of a literature review are presented, looking at Nordic studies on young people's conceptions and expectations related to family life and parenthood, as well as various perspectives from each country on the practices in leave take-up of young parents. In addition, the report presents results of a comparative analysis on values related to gender roles and gender equality among young adults, and comparative statistics from the Nordic countries on fertility, education and employment among young adults. Based on this overview, policy recommendations are formulated and research gaps identified around the topic of parenthood and leave policies for young people.

Keywords: parental leave, gender equality, young people, Nordic countries

Tiivistelmä

Johanna Lammi-Taskula (toim.). Young Parents on Parental Leave in the Nordic Countries [Nuorten vanhempien vanhempainvapaat pohjoismaissa]. Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos (THL). Työpaperi 13/2022. 47 sivua. Helsinki 2022. ISBN 978-952-343-849-1 (verkkojulkaisu)

Sukupuolten tasa-arvon edistäminen niin työelämän kuin yksityiselämän kuten perheen ja hoivan alueella on yksi Pohjoismaisten yhteiskuntien keskeisiä piirteitä. Perhevapaat ja erityisesti molemmille vanhemmille kiintiöidyt vanhempainvapaan jaksot ovat tärkeä osa tasa-arvopolitiikkaa. Vanhempainvapaiden käyttö ja jakautuminen vanhempien kesken on yhteydessä moniin sosiodemografisiin taustatekijöihin mukaan luettuna ikä. Lasten saaminen nuorella iällä lisää sosiaalisia riskejä koulutuksessa ja työelämässä, ja näillä riskeillä on yhteys myös mahdollisuuteen pitää perhevapaata.

Vaikka nuorista ja erilaisista nuoriin liittyvistä taloudellisista ja sosiaalisista riskeistä on tehty paljon tutkimusta, nuorten mahdollisuuksia pitää perhevapaata tai perhevapaiden seurauksia nuorilla on tutkittu vähemmän. Tässä raportissa kootaan olemassa olevaa tietoa nuorten äitien ja isien perhevapaista pohjoismaissa samoin kuin tietoa nuorten arvoista, toiveista ja käsityksistä suhteessa vanhemmuuteen sekä ansiotyön ja lastenhoidon yhteensovittamiseen.

Raportti esittelee eri pohjoismaissa tehtyjen kirjallisuuskatsausten tuloksia nuorten käsityksistä ja odotuksista liittyen perhe-elämään ja vanhemmuuteen ja nostaa esille eri näkökulmia kustakin maasta nuorten aikuisten perhevapaiden käytöstä. Raportissa esitetään myös vertailevan analyysin tuloksia nuorten aikuisten sukupuolirooleihin ja sukupuolten tasa-arvoon liittyvistä asenteista sekä vertailevaa tilastotietoa syntyvyydestä, koulutuksesta ja työllisyydestä nuorten aikuisten parissa pohjoismaissa. Tutkimuskatsauksen pohjalta esitetään politiikkasuosituksia ja nostetaan esille nuorten aikuisten vanhemmuuteen ja perhevapaisiin liittyviä tutkimustarpeita.

Avainsanat: vanhempainvapaa, sukupuolten tasa-arvo, nuoret vanhemmat, pohjoismaat

Sammandrag

Johanna Lammi-Taskula (red.). Young Parents on Parental Leave in the Nordic Countries [Unga föräldrar på föräldraledighet i Norden]. Institutet för hälsa och välfärd (THL). Diskussionsunderlag 13/2022. 47 sidor. Helsingfors, Finland 2022. ISBN 978-952-343-849-1 (nätpublikation)

Främjandet av jämställdhet mellan könen både i arbetslivet och privatlivet så som i familjen och barnavård är en central funktion i Norden. Föräldraledighet och speciellt delar av ledighet som är kvoterade till båda föräldrarna är en viktig del av jämställdhetspolitiken. Användningen och delandet av föräldraledighet mellan föräldrar är kopplat till många sociodemografiska bakgrundsfaktorer inklusive åldern. Att få barn vid ung ålder ökar sociala risker i utbildningen och arbetlivet, och dessa risker påverkar också möjligheten att ta ut ledighet.

Det finns mycket forskning om unga och olika sociala och ekonomiska risker relaterade till ung ålder, men unga föräldrarnas möjligheter till föräldraledighet eller konsekvenser av ledighet bland unga har studerats mindre. I denna rapport sammanställs befintlig information om unga mammors och pappors föräldraledighet i Norden samt kunskap om unga vuxnas värderingar, önskingar och uppfattningar om föräldraskap och sammanjämkningen av förvärvsarbete och vård av barn.

Rapporten presenterar resultat av litteraturöversikter från olika nordiska länder om ungas uppfattningar och förväntningar om familjeliv och föräldraskap och lyfter fram olika perspektiv från varje land om föräldraledighet bland unga vuxna. Rapporten presenterar också resultat av en jämförande analys om unga vuxnas attityder till könsroller och jämlikhet samt jämförande statistik om barnafödande, utbildning och förvärvsarbete bland unga i Norden. På grund av forskningsöversikten ges rekommendationer till policy och behov av ytterligare forskning om unga vuxnas föräldraskap och föräldraledighet.

Nyckelord: föräldraledighet, jämställdhet, unga föräldrar, Norden

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Introduction

Gender equality is a main societal principle and general objective of policy in the Nordic countries, not least in the approach to care and work. These countries hold a specific historical and cultural heritage which has traditionally placed focus on gender equality in society and forming the basis for the dual earner/dual carer model. Gender equality is perceived to be more than equality of opportunity. Equality of outcome and especially the gendered division of unpaid and paid work is central (Leira, 2006). The pursuit of gender equality is thus said to constitute one of the main characteristics of the Nordic welfare model, both in the labour market and in the private sphere, in this way 'Gender equality is integral to Scandinavian citizenship' (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006, p. 7).

Not only is it a shared value, the Nordics countries have also achieved a high level of gender equality in their societies and are generally regarded as 'the leaders on gender equality' (OECD and Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018, p. 1). Often, their family policies which include early education and care (ECEC) and parental leave are highlighted as a central factor for this (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2015). The work and welfare model in the Nordic countries includes rights that support mothers and fathers to care for their child(ren). In particular, the Nordics have been the forerunners for the introduction of non-transferable leave quotas for both parents i.e. earmarking leave also for the father (Esping-Andersen 1990; Ellingsæter & Leira 2006; Eydal & Rostgaard 2012; Duvander et al 2019; Kvande & Brandth 2020).

Such schemes reflect the dominant parental norm of 'dual-earners' and 'dual-carers' which can be seen as a key to achieving equality. In the literature, it has been well established that the parental leave quota policy has affected the division of parental leave between fathers and mothers and consequently women's labour market opportunities and men's opportunities for engaging in care work (Rostgaard and Lausten, 2016).

However, comparative research has also pointed at variations between the Nordic countries in policy design and timing of reforms (Wall 2007; Gislason & Eydal 2010; O'Brien 2016; Teigen & Skjeie 2017). Research has also shown that the take-up and sharing of parental leave between mothers and fathers is related to many socio-economic aspects such as education, employment and income. These socio-economic determinants are also related to age, as young people need to spend many years in education in order to secure a position in the labour market. This has for many led to postponing parenthood until a more stable employment and income is achieved, a situation older generations were less likely to face.

Previous studies indicate that having children at young age increases social and income related risks, such as risks for single parenthood and unemployment (SOU 2003; Haataja 2010; Sihvonen et al., 2020) as well as risks for fixed term employment and part time jobs (Lammi-Taskula, 2004; Salmi et al., 2017). Fixed-term employments are also highly associated with parents' experiences of labour market insecurity (Närvi & Salmi, 2017). These risks do not necessarily mean disadvantages in parenthood, but they have certain consequences for parents' take-up of parental leave and income as well as family formation in general.

Parenthood itself could be interpreted as precarious because giving birth, caring for and raising children, and taking care of their safety increases the fragility of life. Parenthood may increase the precariousness and fragility especially in mothers' lives (Rokkonen 2020), because mothers are usually primarily responsible for taking care of children. This is seen for example in young peoples' school to work transition as long parenting leave can create a break in young women's school to work process but to the same degree not in men's (Ristikari et al., 2016).

Although there is knowledge on the various economic and social risks related to young age, the possibilities and consequences of parental leave among young parents have not been widely studied. This report summarizes what is known about young parents' parental leave take-up in the Nordic countries as well as young peoples' values, hopes and perceptions regarding parenthood and its' different dimensions including the reconciliation of paid employment and childcare responsibilities.

A literature review was conducted looking at Nordic studies published between 2000-2020 focusing on parents and people who are under 30-years of age. The publications were mostly focusing on a national

context while in some one or several Nordic countries were included in international comparisons. The research questions guiding the literature review were:

- What kind of cultural conceptions are there concerning youth, adulthood, and parenthood?
- What kind of perceptions and hopes do young people have about parenthood?
- How does precariousness affect young mothers' parental leave take-up?
- Do young parents share parental leave and care responsibilities more or less equally compared to older parents?

In addition, a comparative analysis of the World Values Survey and European Values Study (2017) data on gender values among young adults was conducted, and comparative statistics from the Nordic countries on fertility, education and employment among young adults were compiled. The preliminary findings of the literature review, comparative statistics and survey analysis were discussed in a workshop with representatives of various youth organisations from the Nordic countries.

The structure and content of this report was designed and edited on the basis of the results and findings of the above mentioned materials and feedback from the youth organisations. First, present the results of the survey on gender attitudes among young people in the Nordic countries and key statistics related to the parenthood, studies and employment of young adults. This is followed by an overview of the findings of previous research on young people's conceptions and expectations related to family life and parenthood. Then we introduce the parental leave schemes and take-up of leave by mothers and fathers in the Nordic countries, as well as various perspectives from each country on the practices in leave take-up of young parents. Finally, we discuss the key findings, policy recommendations as well as need for future research around the topic of parenthood and leave policies for young people.

Gender attitudes among young adults

The cultural conceptions of gender values and ideologies pertaining to the issue of parenthood and gender equality have been studied in the European Values Study, which is a cross-national and cross-sectional survey program that covers various issues and beliefs surveyed on representative samples of the resident adult populations in Europe (data and documentation can be found at <https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/>). However, whether these values are shared across generations or are particular for the Nordic young individuals, has been assessed to a lesser extent. Thus, in the report, we analyse what are the attitudes of Nordic young individuals to questions of gender equality relating to parenthood and working life.

In the analysis, we compare these attitudes on a country level as well as by education and gender. Likewise, we view the development of gender attitudes over time. The European Values Study data includes a wide array of variables covering a vast number of items relating to values. Likewise, the data includes many background variables such as educational level, income and so forth, making it useful for regression-type analysis. Through an OLS regression analysis we examine how employment status, parental status, education, country of origin and political beliefs have an impact on youths' gender attitudes. The central focus in this analysis is how precarious positions and life situations affect young people's gender role attitudes in the Nordic countries.

For the present analysis, three dependent variables relating to gender attitudes are of special interest. Each of the three variables measure the degree to which the respondent agrees with various statements relating to the issue of gender in terms of working life and family. The three statements are:

1. *When a mother works for pay, the children suffer*
2. *A job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children*
3. *A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family.*

For all three statements, possible response categories were 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree', 'strongly disagree'. We include binary recoded versions of each variable where 'strongly agree' has been combined with 'agree' and likewise 'strongly disagree' with 'disagree'.

In the analysis of data from the 2017-2020 wave, we also designed a simple gender value additive index with the three variables. A high value on the gender index indicates a high extent of agreeing with the statements, i.e. a low level of positive attitude towards equality in these matters. The Cronbach's alpha value for this index is 0.68.

All three variables are included in the 2017-2020 wave of EVS. Only the statement 'When a mother works for pay, the children suffer' and 'A job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children' are featured in several rounds of EVS. Thus, development in time can be assessed for only these variables.

It is worth noting an important limitation when working with the mentioned variables: in 2017, this specific item was changed for Norway, Sweden, Iceland and Finland – but it was, however, not changed in Denmark. Thus, in the 2017-2020 wave of EVS, for Denmark the statement is 'A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works'. However, as reported by Rostgaard & Ejrnæs (2021, p. 316), the trend within this particular variable is comparable in all the Nordic countries, and as such, it seems the change in wording has not had a notable effect on the extent of individuals that agree.

Also, we find it important to point to some methodological issues relating to the design and internal validity of the items specifically. First, items 1 and 2 relate to how respondents assess family and gender – but only in relation to women. Second, relating to item 1, technically, we cannot measure if this is an issue of children generally suffering with working parents – or suffering because of inadequate childcare options, that makes it hard for women to work for pay.

We mostly limit the analysis to the young adults' age group (18-30). Where relevant, we compare our results with the findings of Rostgaard and Ejrnæs (2020) who used the same data and the same variables, to investigate gender attitudes in the population at large.

The table below shows the number of respondents included in the analysis. As shown, the number for most of the countries, with the exception of Denmark, is rather low for the subset of the data that only includes young individuals.

Table 1: Number of respondents in the EVS data

	Denmark		Finland		Iceland		Norway		Sweden	
	2017-2020	All years	2017-2020	All years	2017-2020	All years	2017-2020	All years	2017-2020	All years
All respondents	3362	8104	1199	3959	1624	5029	1122	4502	1194	5397
Of which age < 30	485	1598	165	726	281	1307	194	936	174	1022

In the following sections, we present the extent to which respondents agree with the three statements included in the 2017-2020 wave of EVS. First, we present this on a country aggregated level, before breaking it down according to gender and educational level. As shown in Figure 1, for all three variables, the share of young respondents that agree or strongly agree is under 75 per cent in all countries. Likewise, the share that strongly agree is under 10 per cent as well. This signifies that generally, amongst youth in the Nordic countries, there is agreement on gender equality in terms of parenthood and work life.

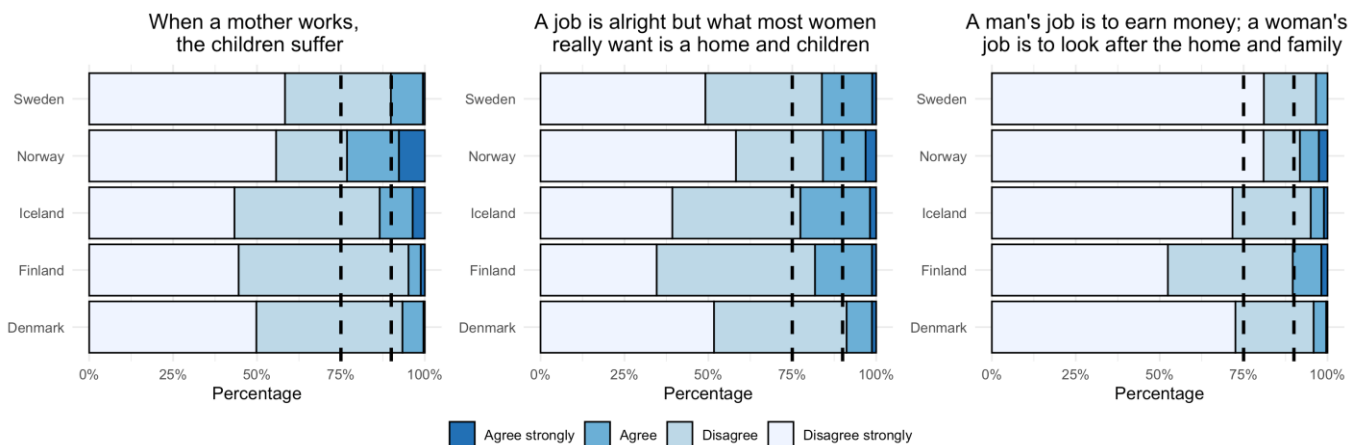


Figure 1: Attitudes on gender equality, respondents below the age of 30, Nordic countries, 2017-2020. Share that strongly agree or agree.

It can be hypothesized that women are more in favor of gender equality in relation to family and work. Rostgaard & Ejrnæs (2020) show that amongst all age groups, there is a statistically significant difference in the extent of individuals that agree with all the statements if grouped by gender; thus, women are less likely to agree with the statements than men. In this analysis, we find the same gender difference when we look at the younger groups. As shown in Figure 2, there seems to be differences based on gender in all countries, although the effect differs. Later, we will analyse the correlation between gender and gender attitudes by means of regression analysis.

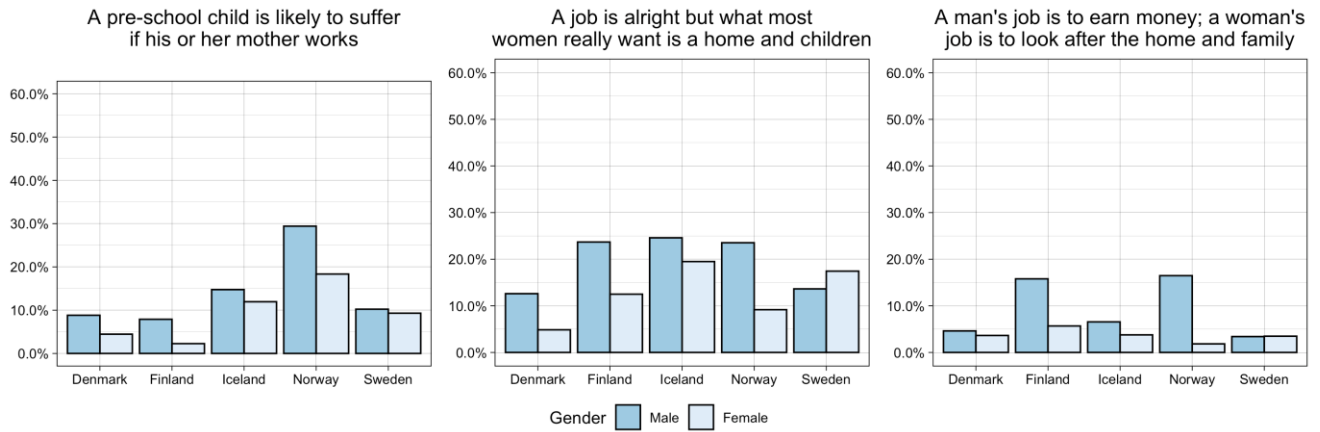


Figure 2: Attitudes on gender equality, respondents below the age of 30 according to gender, Nordic countries, 2017-2020. Share that strongly agree or agree.

Rostgaard & Ejrnæs (2020) point to a significant difference in gender attitudes based on educational level amongst all age groups. Is this also the case for young respondents under 30? Figure 3 clearly shows a pattern in the extent to which respondents with different educational backgrounds agree with the various statements. Generally, lower education level suggests a higher share of individuals that agree with the statements, and thus give their support to a more traditional gender pattern in the distribution of paid work between men and women.

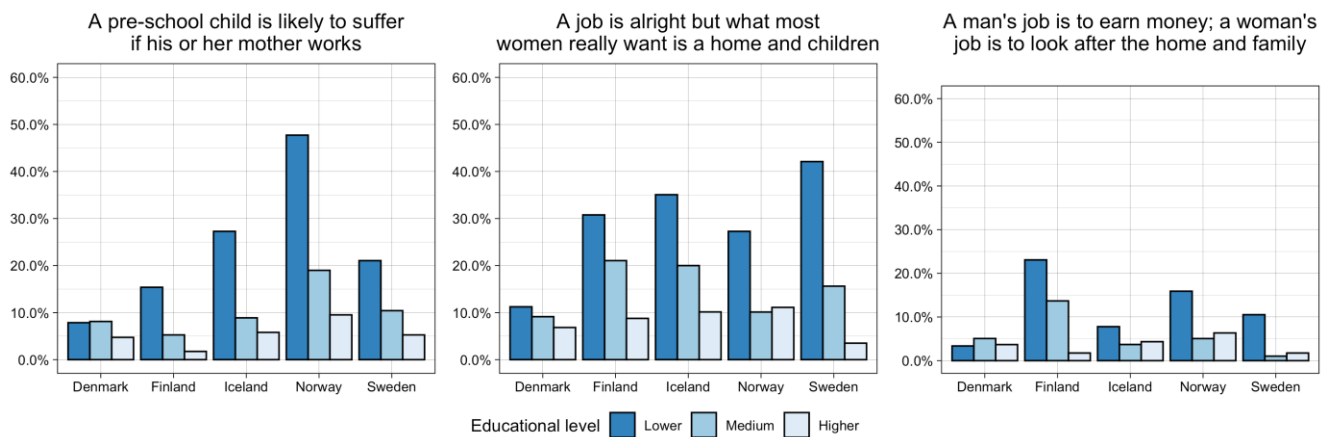


Figure 3: Attitudes on gender equality, respondents below the age of 30 according to educational level, Nordic countries, 2017-2020. Share that strongly agree or agree.

Development in young people's gender attitudes over time is different than that of the rest of the population. In Figure 4, we illustrate the discrepancy between youth and all respondents in whether they agree with the statements 'A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works' and 'A job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children'¹. There is a general tendency that youth are less likely to agree with these particular statements, and the discrepancy within countries has remained rather stable over time. For the first statement the share that agrees has decreased rather drastically while the discrepancy between young people and all respondents remains relatively stable. For the latter statement, the discrepancy has to some extent narrowed down. It is worth mentioning that the development in the first variable cannot

¹ 3 The data for the first variable in the 1991-2001 is missing for Norway as the question was not included in this round. The data for the second variable is missing Sweden in the 1990-1993 round and in Norway in the 1999-2001 round.

be attributed solely to the development in gender attitudes – it might also be due to institutional developments in the countries, i.e. in child care policies; for example, one might agree less with the statement if there are child care policies in place that provide high quality and affordable daycare when both parents are working.

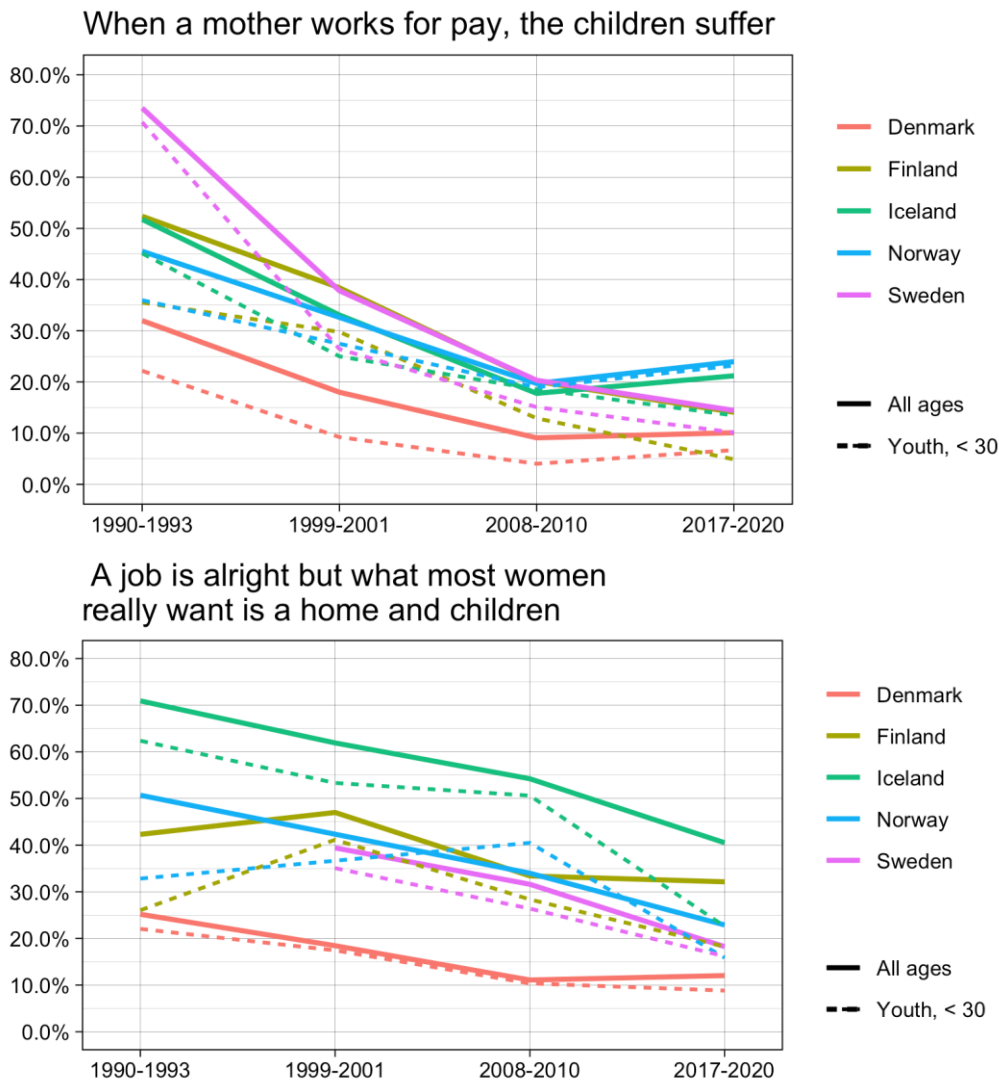


Figure 4: Attitudes on gender equality for youth compared to the whole sample in the Nordic countries, 1990- 2020. % who strongly agree or agree ²

To assess which factors are associated with gender attitudes, we analyze the 2017-2020 EVS wave in the age group 15- 30. We use simple linear OLS-regression for this purpose. To carry out this analysis, we have constructed various dummy variables. Our dependent variable is an index based on the three questions. Higher values indicate more traditional gender roles. The results of the regression analysis are shown in Figure 5 and in Table 2. They correspond with the descriptive analyses above; namely, sociodemographic characteristics such as country and educational level are significantly correlated with one’s gender attitudes. In addition, employment status also explains some of the variation in gender attitudes. In this regard, there are several factors that seem to make one more prone to agreeing with the statements in the index.

² Data on both question is missing for Norway in 1999-2001

The mean difference between men and women when controlling for other variables (Model 1) is statistically significant, meaning that females are less prone to agree with the statements, even when controlled for other sociodemographic variables while young men have more traditional gender role attitudes. The significant interaction effect indicates that the gender differences in gender role attitudes are greater in Norway and Finland. Likewise, having children – even when controlled for age as well as educational level and employment status – also has an effect; those who have children are significantly more likely to agree with the statements i.e. have more traditional gender attitudes. Thus, young parents seem to hold more traditional gender role attitudes compared to young non-parents.

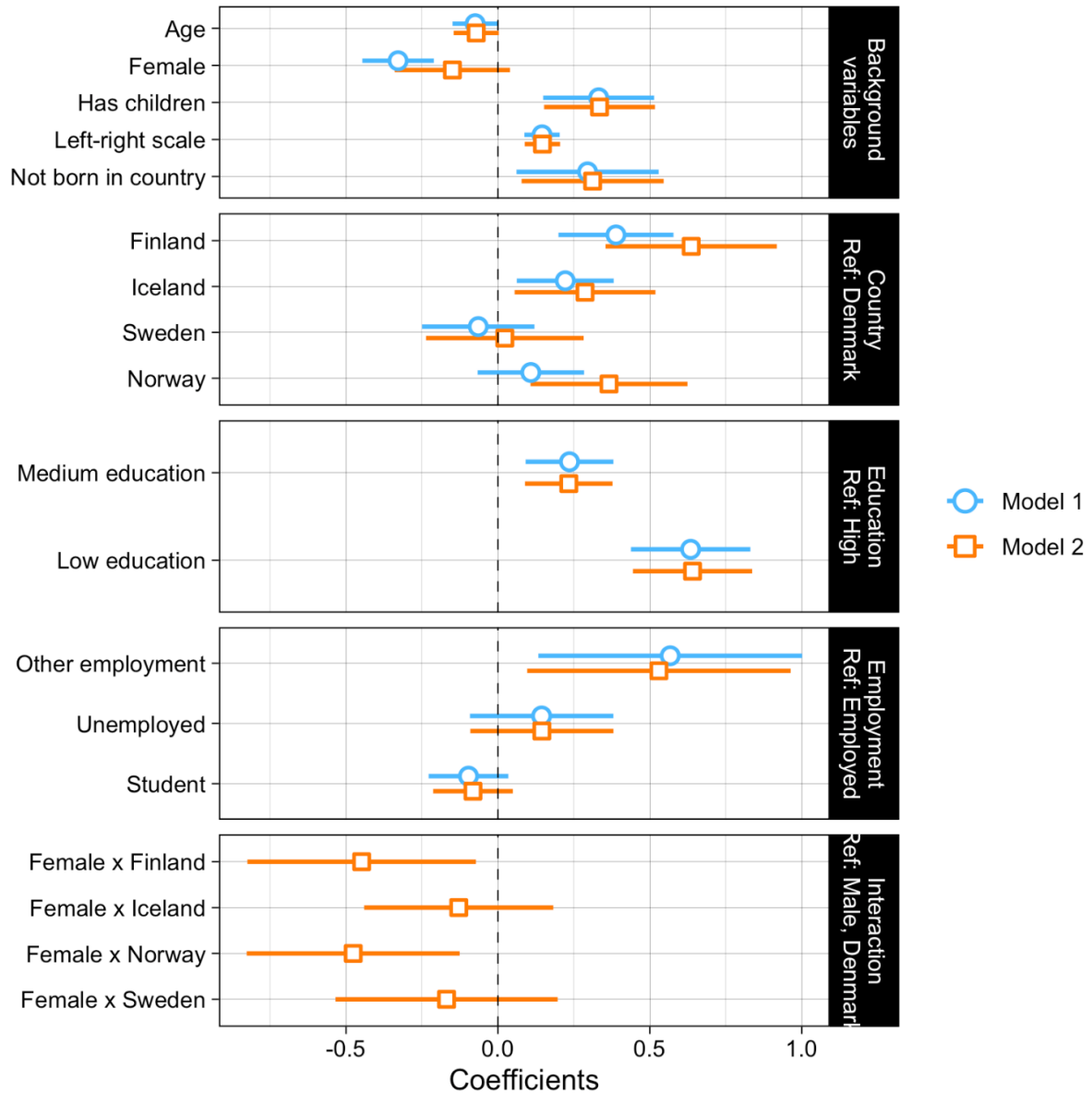


Figure 5: Linear regression: Gender attitude index according to background factors (unstandardized coefficients)

In terms of educational level, both medium and low educational level (in comparison to high educational level) are significant when controlled for other variables (Model 1 & 2). Traditional gender roles seem to be more common among lower educated youth compared to higher educated youth. In terms of country-level differences, the regression analysis shows that Denmark and Sweden have less traditional gender role attitudes among youth than do the other Nordic countries. The most striking difference is found between

Denmark and Finland, corresponding to the descriptive analyses above. However, the coefficients for Iceland and Norway are also significant in comparison to Denmark – although for the case of Norway only in model 2.

In terms of employment status, surprisingly, there is no notable difference between those in employment, and the unemployed individuals. However, those belonging to the group ‘other types of employment’ or being in military duty, retired or pensioned, have significantly more traditional gender values compared to employed youth. Also, in terms of various other precarious situations, it should be noted that not being foreign born influences gender attitudes as well; those who are not born in the country are more likely to agree with the statements. However, this can also be an effect of the specific countries where people have immigrated from, i.e., that there might be a tendency that these countries generally have a higher level of traditional gender views. Finally, it becomes clear that the political belief of respondents plays into their gender attitudes; namely, one is more likely to agree with the statements in the index if one is of a more right-winged belief – i.e., right-winged individuals are more likely to agree with traditional gender attitudes.

Table 2: Gender attitude index according to background factors, linear regression

	Model 1	Model 2
(Intercept)	-0.24**	-0.34***
Age	-0.07*	-0.07
Female (d)	-0.33***	-0.15
Has children (d)	0.33***	0.33***
Finland (d) ^a	0.39***	0.64***
Iceland (d) ^a	0.22**	0.29*
Sweden (d) ^a	-0.06	0.02
Norway (d) ^a	0.11	0.37**
Medium education (d) ^b	0.24**	0.23**
Low education (d) ^b	0.63***	0.64***
Other employment (d) ^c	0.57*	0.53*
Unemployed (d) ^c	0.14	0.14
Student c	-0.10	-0.08
Political view (left-right) ^d	0.15***	0.15***
Not born in country (d)	0.30*	0.31**
Female * Finland ^e		-0.13
Female * Iceland ^e		-0.45*
Female * Norway ^e		-0.48**
Female * Sweden ^e		-0.17
N	1021	1021
R ²	0.16	0.17

*** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05

a) reference = Denmark; b) reference = high education; c) reference = employed d) 1 = left, 10=right

e) reference = Denmark, male

Fertility and parenthood of young adults

In general, the fertility rates in the Nordic countries have been relatively high, which has often been explained through comprehensive family policies (Ellingsæter & Pedersen 2013). Causal relationships between policies and fertility rates are however complex and difficult to identify statistically. As the mean age of having the first child has continued to rise (OECD, 2019), there are less and less young parents. During the recent years, fertility among young women under 30 years of age has decreased in all the Nordic countries (Figure 6). The increased number of students, prolonged periods spent in education, and delayed labour market entry are often described as contributing factors to this development (Home 2000; Thalberg 2013).

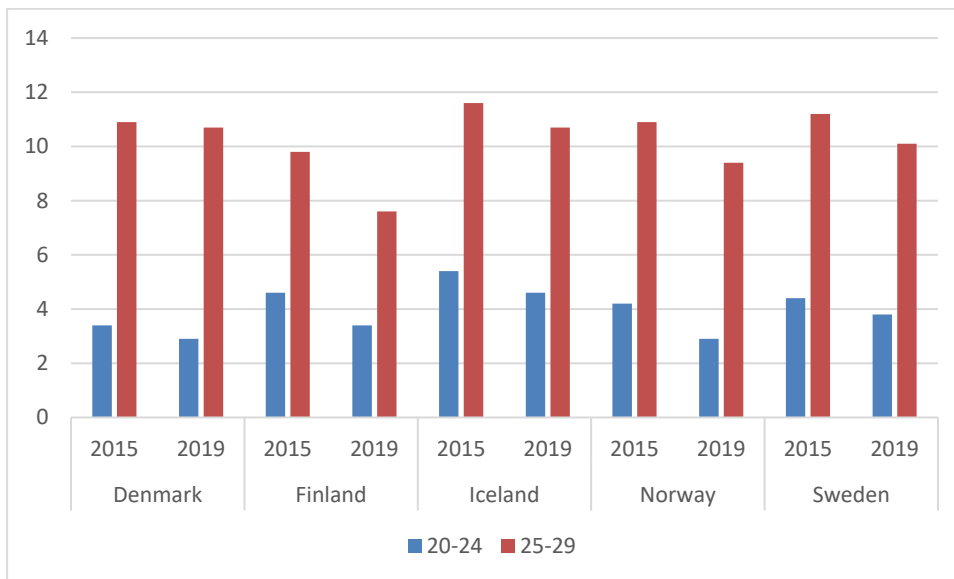


Figure 6. Number of children born per 100 women in the Nordic countries in 2015 and 2019, according to age group (source: Eurostat)

The fertility rate of women aged 20-24 is somewhat higher in Iceland than in the other Nordic countries. In other words, people in Iceland have children at a younger age than elsewhere. Reasons for this have been found on the one hand in attitudes, and on the other hand in social policy. According to the 2018 round of the European Social Survey, only 15 per cent of respondents in Iceland agreed that the ideal age for becoming a parent was at least 30 years, compared to 29 per cent of all participants in Europe. In the other Nordic countries, the percentage ranged between 22 in Denmark and 35 in Sweden. Furthermore, only 7 per cent of survey respondents in Iceland disapproved of having children before marriage, a view held by 15 per cent on average in the participating countries (European Social Survey, 2018). Indeed, 70 per cent of all children born in 2018, and 83 per cent of firstborn children were born outside marriage in Iceland which is the highest rate in Europe (Jónsson 2021).

In 2020, there were over 100 000 children born to parents under 30 in the Nordic countries (Figure 7). Two in five of these babies were born in Sweden where the population is largest; in Iceland only about 1600 children were born to young parents. Becoming a parent when under 30 is more common in the age group 25-29 than at younger age: less than 5000 babies were born in 2020 to parents under 25 in Norway, Finland and Denmark, and little over 8000 babies in Sweden.

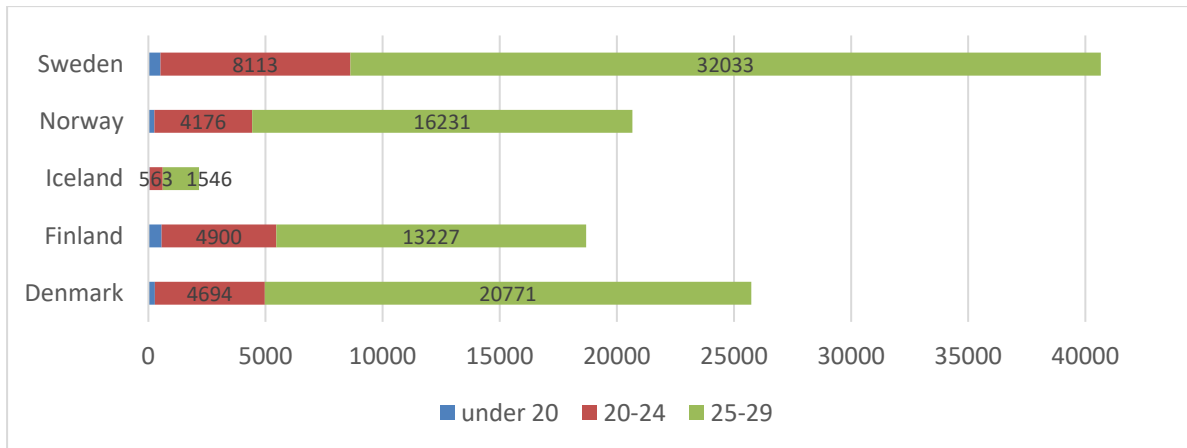


Figure 7. Number of children born in the Nordic countries 2020, according to the mother's age (source: nordicstatistics.org)

For most young people, having a child is something positive. The National Board of Youth Affairs and Statistics Sweden (2003) asked young people aged 16–29 about the importance of having started a family when they were 35 years old. Eighty-two per cent of women and 70 per cent of men answered that it was important. Almost one in four thought it was very important (The National Board of Youth Affairs 2003). However, many in this study also found great value in a variation of experiences, apart from studies and working, before becoming parents.

The Swedish Social Insurance Agency (2006) conducted a focus group study including men and women who have had children at young age (18-24). This study reported that most of them had not planned to have children when they did. Becoming a parent at a young age is not something that they regretted, although they might have chosen differently if they were able to plan ahead (Swedish Social Insurance Agency 2006). In the same study, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (2006) found that many young parents believe that because of the relatively smaller age difference between them and their child, they might have a better relationship with their child compared to older parents. However, many young parents experience the possibilities of combining young parenthood with a stable financial situation difficult or even impossible (*ibid.*).

There are various social, labour market and income related risks often associated with parent's young age (e.g. Haataja, 2010, Sihvonen et al. 2020; Lammi-Taskula, 2004; Salmi et al., 2017; Närvi & Salmi, 2017). According to previous research on the conditions of family formation, the general perception among young people in the Nordic countries is that one should have a stable job and stable partnership, and be able to support oneself before having children (Danielsson, Rogala & Sundström 2003; Ketokivi 2005; Thalberg 2013; Klemetti et al. 2014; Sørensen et. al 2016; Kärmeniemi & Mörönen 2017; Alakärppä et al. 2020). Thus, most young people wait with forming a family until they have completed their education and have gotten established in the labour market.

Combining children with studies of higher education is generally difficult; women who have relatively low levels of income and women who are enrolled as students generally have lower fertility than other women (Andersson 2000). According to a study on register data from Sweden, younger female students were significantly less likely to have a first child than non-students of the same age. While older students often have worked before enrolling in education and are therefore entitled to earnings-related parental leave benefit, this is not the case among younger students. As women use most of the parental leave, female students are more dependent on having an income before having a child. Couples where the woman was a student had the lowest propensity for continued childbearing i.e. having a second or third child, while there was no difference to employed couples if only the man was a student (Thalberg 2013).

A stable job position with a decent income has shown to be a precondition to having children for both men and women in Sweden. In interviews with students, lack of economic security largely explained why young people wanted to finish their educational goals before having their first child (Thalberg 2013). Based on register data between 1983 to 1998 in Sweden, Duvander and Olsson (2001) found that the higher the

income of both men and women, the more likely they are to have a first child. The same was shown to apply for a second child using register data ranging between 1981 to 1999 (Andersson & Duvander 2003).

This pattern is however not the same in all age groups; a low income seems to affect younger women (under 30) to not have children more than it does to older women (31-45) (Duvander & Olsson 2001). Further, based on Statistics Sweden's Labor Force Surveys (LFS) linked to register data from 1987–1998 (SCB 2001) and respectively 1987–2004 (Lundström and Andersson 2012), show that young people in temporary employment are less likely than those who are in permanent employment to have a first child. Additionally, Kaufman and Bernhardt (2012) showed through analyzing survey data (YAPS) that men are more likely to enter fatherhood if they work part-time or are in a workplace where taking parental leave is easy, and women are more likely to have a first child if their partner's job pays well. However, many of these studies are somewhat outdated. It is important to remember that patterns of childbearing change over time, and studies from two decades ago may not describe the present patterns.

Ellingsæter and Pedersen (2013) asked young adults in Norway about under what economics conditions they would consider entering parenthood, and whether family policy arrangements were of any significance in this decision. Irrespective of gender and social class, a desire for children was common. You have children when you are 'ready', and the quality and stability of the relationship was important for the parenthood decision. Apparently, in Norway the transition to parenthood was surrounded by few financial problems. The risk of unemployment, for example, was to a small extent expressed as a restriction on parenthood. The informants used terms such as 'financial security' that convey different strategies and norms for the material aspects of parenthood.

There seems to be clear class differences in the conditions of family formation and parenthood. In the Norwegian study (Ellingsæter & Pedersen 2013), an underlying common condition was a two-parent model i.e. women and men in both middle class and working class expected their partner to contribute to the family income. However, the living standard that was considered necessary for having and raising children varied and 'financial security' has a different content in the two groups.

In the upper middle class where both partners have very good incomes, the lifestyle and the expectations and requirements for the material framework around children is on a much higher level than in the working class. The high expectations seem to reflect the 'infinite' requirements that middle-class parents impose on themselves to meet the child's needs (Stefansen 2008).

In public discourse there are some stereotypic perceptions of young people's relation to work. Evidence from the literature does not support the argument that the younger generations would be less work-orientated than older generations (Aapola-Kari & Wrede-Jäntti, 2017; Pyöriä & Ojala, 2016). Pasi Pyöriä's and Satu Ojala's (2016) study shows that regardless of age, the value given to work has remained consistently high for the past three decades. At the same time, leisure as well as home and family life have gained increasing importance with all employed people (see also Pyöriä ym., 2017). The Finnish Youth Barometer 2019 (Myllyniemi & Haikkola, 2020) also supports these findings: work and family are both highly valued by young people. Young adults' - especially women's - agency in relation to work, education and family life can be interpreted as liquid as they move back and forth between education, work, and childcare (Laakkonen et al. 2017).

Education and employments of young adults

Reaching a stable socio-economic position that is considered necessary for family formation by young adults is related to education and employment possibilities. Certainty regarding labour market attachment and educational level can thus positively affect men's and women's first-birth rates whereas growing general uncertainty may manifest itself in transitions from education to work, living in a co-residential union, and parenthood. In the turn of the century, young people in Sweden delayed their entry into adulthood, and needed more time than previous cohorts to find an occupation that matched their education (Bygren et al. 2005).

On the other hand, a consequence of early parenthood could be the postponement or an interruption of education. Postponed and interrupted studies may be a future obstacle to establishment in the labour market compared to peers without children (SOU 2003: 92). When comparing younger parents to older ones, it is evident that single parenthood – especially single - motherhood is more common among the young (Swedish Social Insurance Agency 2006).

Damm (2021) assessed how the educational opportunities are affected by becoming a mother in a young age in Denmark. She found that the risk of ending up without secondary education is more than double for women who give birth to their first child before the age of 22. Likewise, she also shows a link between the social class of women and the age of becoming a mother for the first time – the higher the social class of the woman, the less likely she is of becoming a young mother.

The proportion of young people that neither study nor work (NEET) has been relatively high and stable over the last years. For example in Sweden, the proportion was 7.5 per cent among 16–24 year-old people in 2014 and 12.6 per cent in the age group 25–29, compared with 7.1 and 12.1 per cent in 2007 (MUCF 2017). In 2014, differences between men and women were small, especially among native Swedes. Some groups are overrepresented among the young people that neither work nor study. Among these high-risk individuals, we find people with low educational level, people with physical or mental disabilities, foreign-born, people identifying as LGBTQ, and people of poor socioeconomic backgrounds (MUCF 2017). About 60 to 70 per cent of young people who neither work nor study for the duration of one year are in the same situation the following year, and half of them remain in that situation for at least three years in Sweden (SOU 2013:74).

In Iceland, the number of people not in employment, education, or training (NEET) is low compared to most European countries. According to Statistics Iceland (2021d), 7.4 per cent of 20 to 24-year-olds and 7.5 per cent of 25 to 29-year-olds were neither working nor studying in 2018. Although the differences between men and women are small, it is more common for women than men to neither work nor study. While 6.2 per cent of 20 to 24-year-old men, and 7 per cent of 25 to 29-year-old men, were neither working nor studying in 2018, the same held true for 8.7 per cent of women in the younger age group and 8.2 per cent of women in the older one. Research shows that young people with a non-Icelandic background are more likely to belong to the NEET-group than young people whose parents were born and raised in Iceland (Arnardottir, 2020). The proportion that neither works nor studies is lower for young people than those that are older, as 12.2 per cent of people aged 35 to 60, were neither working nor studying in 2018.

Statistics from the Nordic countries show positive development during the past decade in this respect (Figure 8). The proportion of early school leavers i.e. those who have not continued in further education or training after lower secondary school has been declining. There are however differences between the Nordic countries in the level of education of young adults, as well as some gender differences. Young women continue their education more often than young men in all countries, and the share of young men who only have a lower secondary education was in 2010 higher in Iceland and Norway than in the other countries but there has recently been a considerable decline. The relatively big variation may however also be due to changes in measurement.

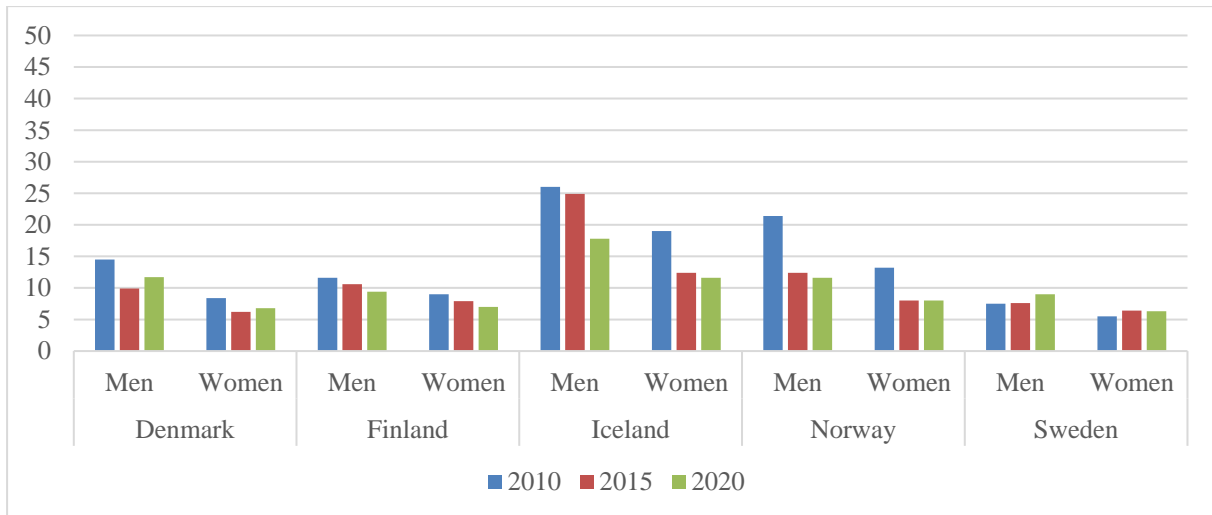


Figure 8. Early school leavers in the Nordic countries 2010-2020: 18 to 24-year-olds with a lower secondary education, not involved in further education and training (%) (source: nordicstatistics.org)

After completing education, young adults need to find a job in order to achieve economic independence for themselves and for a potential family. Nordic statistics show some positive development in employment rates of young adults especially in Denmark and Iceland, and in Norway the situation has been quite positive during the past decade (Figure 9). In Finland and Sweden, the position of young adults in the labour market is somewhat weaker and the unemployment rate of especially young men is quite a high. About one in five men in the age group 20-24 were unemployed in 2020 in Sweden and Finland, and among young women in the same age group the share was about 15 per cent. These young adults may not feel ready to become parents due to economic insecurity.

In 2018, Iceland had the smallest percentage of people aged 20-29 years old (both with or without children) at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Europe. In Iceland, as elsewhere, the rate was much lower for employed persons than for those without employment (Eurostat, 2021). Unemployment in Iceland is low by international standards, for both men and women. In the years 2015 to 2019 the unemployment rate ranged between 3 and 4.5 per cent but had risen to 6 per cent in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

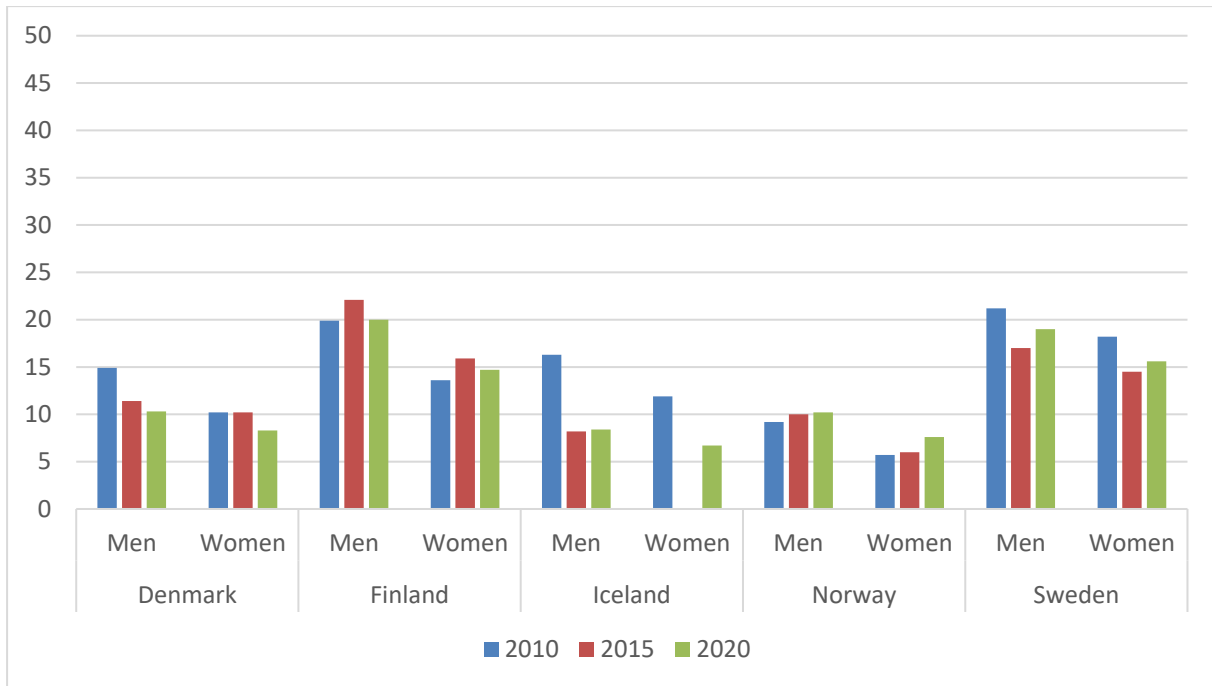


Figure 9. Unemployment rate among 20-24-year-old women and men in the Nordic countries 2010-2020 (%) (source: nordicstatistics.org)

Finding paid employment brings more security to the life of young adults, but this security is often temporary and fragile. Experiences of fixed term employment or insecurity of work may manifest themselves as postponing family formation. In Finland, a precarious labour market status seems to polarize family formation: parents with fixed-term employment have more children and they have them earlier than average, or they do not have children at all (Sutela, 2013; Wilska, 2005).

In their analysis of Danish administrative register data, Kreyenfeld and Andersson (2014) found that among men and women with high levels of education, parenthood is likely to be postponed when being unemployed – however, this was not the case for male and female counterparts with low levels of education. Andersen and Özcan (2021) analysed the link between unemployment and fertility on Danish administrative data and found that men are more likely to delay the birth of their first child when they are unemployed.

A representative survey from Denmark (Warming 2016) showed that 45 per cent of women and 23 per cent of men had experienced one or more forms of discrimination in relation to pregnancy and the issue of leave, which signifies a need for a continuous focus on the risk of discrimination of young parents in employment.

In Sweden, young women (16-24 years) working in traditional working-class occupations were more often underemployed (Westerlund et al. 2005). Almost one third of these women worked less than they would want to. The weak position in the labour market gave these women poor prospects of financially supporting themselves as parents. Also temporary employment is more common among young people, and more common among women than men (SCB 2020).

The effect of fixed-term employment on family formation is somewhat dependent on the parent's experience of stability of employment. Fixed-term employment with a relatively stable labour market status does not increase the probability of childlessness, whereas fixed-term employment with an unstable labour market status does (Sutela 2013). Other challenges in the life course, such as issues with health, wellbeing, and overall coping with personal life, have a stronger influence on unemployed and low educated women's expectations of family formation (Alakärppä et al. 2020). Postponing family formation could also be seen as a rational choice for balancing the parallel transitions of emerging adulthood and the contradictions related to them (Lepola, 2018; Lindroos et al., 2020).

According to Nordic statistics, temporary employment was common among young people under 25 years in 2020 especially in Sweden and Finland (Figure 10). While in Sweden half of employed young people in

the age group 15-24 had a temporary contract, in Norway and Iceland the share was one in four. For the age group 25-34 temporary jobs were clearly less common but more typical among young women than men.

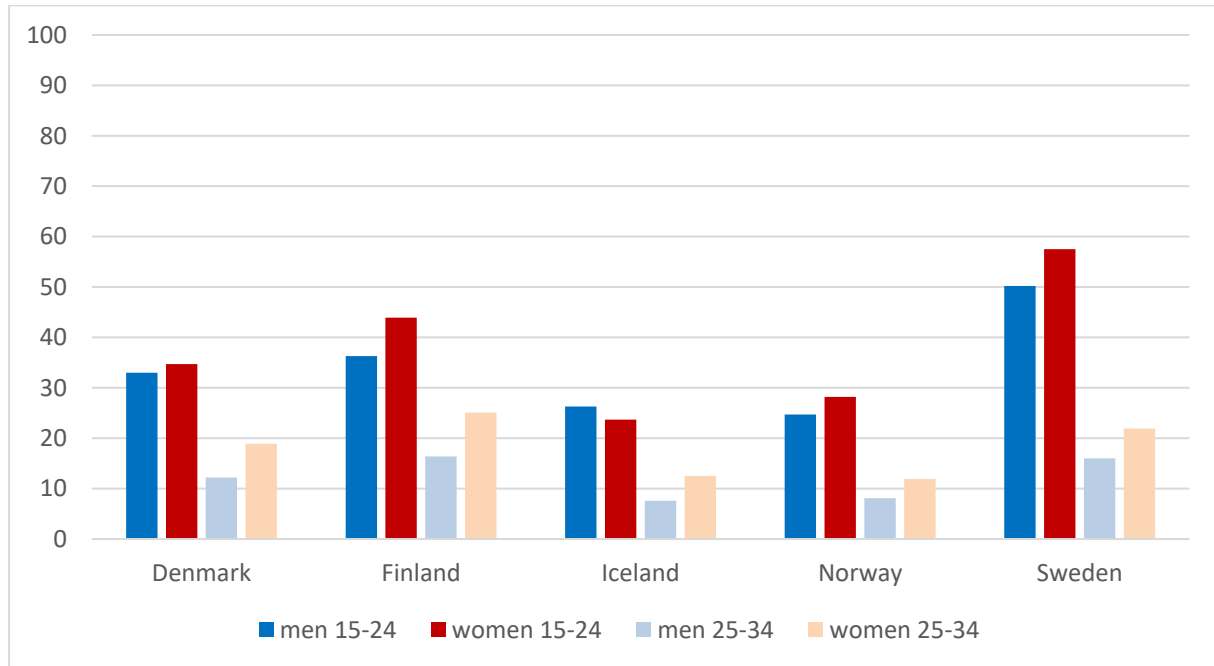


Figure 10. Temporary employment among employed young women and men in the Nordic countries 2020, % (source: Eurostat)

When analysing the unemployment of families with children in Finland, Pertti Honkanen (2016) has found that receiving unemployment benefit was equally common with both men and women in different age categories, although in the youngest and oldest age categories unemployment was slightly more common among men than women. Young fathers experience income related scarcity more frequently than older fathers (Salmi et al., 2014), but family formation at young age effects negatively especially on mothers' wages (Kuitto et al., 2019; Napari, 2010).

In addition to a weaker position in the labour market – and often due to that - young adults often face economic uncertainty. Under 30 years old single mothers seem to be in a greater risk to get maintenance support compared to older mothers (Ahola, 2016). Parent's young age (under 20-24 years) is also a risk factor for receiving minimum income support (Haataja, 2010; Saarikallio-Torp et al., 2010) and not getting income-related parental leave benefit (Haataja, 2014). In Iceland, since the beginning of this century the percentage of young people living with their parents has gone up and this change has mainly happened in the capital area where housing is most expensive (Statistics Iceland, 2021e).

Foreign-born people have a weaker degree of establishment and generally lower wages (Engdahl & Forslund 2016), although age at immigration seems to moderate these effects (Böhlmark et al. 2009; Ruist 2018). A report from Sweden (MUCF 2021) shows that parenthood affects the opportunities for the establishment of young foreign-born women, which could partly be explained by their lower employment rate and their comparably higher parental leave uptake.

Cultural conceptions of youth, adulthood and parenthood

Previous literature shows that there is both change and continuities in the preconditions of the transition from youth to adulthood in the Nordic countries. At the turn of the century, traditional and social indicators of adulthood such as independence, independent livelihood, own home, and own family were still important milestones of adulthood, but marriage and children had lost their centrality (Oinonen, 2001).

Young people grow up adapting to old and new social norms that regulate life and it is the adulthood rather than youth that is in transformation (Ketokivi 2005; Mary 2012). Having children ‘too young’ (too early) or ‘too old’ (too late) seem to challenge on the one hand the middle-class notion of prolonged youth and performing the ‘right’ kind of young femininity (Niemelä, 2005). By committing to family without or before higher education or work career, young mothers break the normative expectations in an education-centred society.

In interviews with young people in Finland (Ketokivi 2004), postponing family formation was related to both individualist and more family-centred reasons: an individualist lifestyle was seen as a threat for the baby's well-being, so one must get it ‘out of the way’ before having children. Even though partnership is considered essential for family formation, a general attitude is that children could well be raised by single parents (Hakovirta et al., 2016).

The social risks that are often associated with parent’s young age do not necessarily define the young parents’ lived experiences in their everyday life. For example, young women interviewed in Finland emphasized the positive aspects of their life situation as a part of a chain of generations and a broader nuclear family community, thus differentiating their position from negative interpretations of young motherhood (Peltola 2018; 2020). In another study, young mothers in Finland (Kelhä 2008) valued common sense when raising their children. Common sense manifests itself as cultural capital as it is associated to working class status in general.

The idea of ‘the involved father’ has emerged in the Nordic countries during the past two to three decades (Farstad & Stefansen, 2015). The shift in attitudes also presents itself in the way young men distance themselves from older generations, as was found in a qualitative study in Iceland by Jóhannsdóttir and Gíslason (2017). The study, which reached 18 to 25-year-old Icelandic men, revealed that the young men welcomed changes in gender relations and described how they can allow themselves to be more sensitive and caring than older generations of men. The men were not fathers yet, but they felt that both parents should share the responsibility of caring for children, and linked ideas on ideal masculinity with being an emotionally involved father.

In a study based on qualitative interviews with young Danish and Swedish male students without children, Malling et. al (2020) found that almost all Danish men in the study wished to have children in the future, and typically, they desired to have two or three children. Likewise, they found that the men stressed the importance of generally having a stable life prior to becoming fathers – completing their education, being in a comfortable financial situation as well as being in a committed and stable relationship.

Surveys on attitudes towards fathers’ role in care also indicate that there is a shift towards more gender-equal attitudes among younger generations. In a survey conducted in Iceland in 2008, 98 per cent of men and 97 per cent of women aged 18 to 30 agreed that men who work outside the home should have the right to paid parental leave, while older participants were less likely to agree. For example, the percentage was 72 per cent for men and 88 per cent for women who were 51 to 60 years old (Stefánsson, 2008).

Despite changes in ideas towards gender roles, gender differences within the family still prevail. Research shows that dominant discourses promote motherhood over fatherhood, particularly during pregnancy and infant care. For example, fathers are absent in expert material on pregnancy, birth and nurturing (Símonardóttir, 2016). This raises the question on whether young women believe they will have to make more career sacrifices when having a child than young men do. A survey comparing university students in the Nairobi,

Iceland and Madrid (Fernández-Cornejo et al., 2016) found that male students were less inclined to sacrifice a career for having children than female ones in all three universities. However, the difference between men and women in Iceland diminished when controlling for other variables. There was also a gender difference in the inclination to be highly involved in childcare in the future, with female participants in all three universities showing more anticipation towards being highly involved in childcare than males.

Similar gender-differences have been found among teenagers in Iceland. A survey that reached 15 to 17-year-olds revealed that girls in Iceland hold more egalitarian attitudes towards gendered household roles than boys do. Furthermore, girls with an African, Asian or southern American background were found to hold less egalitarian attitudes towards female gender roles than participants with an Icelandic background, while there were no differences found between boys originating from these parts of the world and their Icelandic counterparts (Bjarnason & Hjalmsdóttir, 2008).

In Finland, previous research findings concerning attitudes towards sharing the family and work life responsibilities among young people are somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, young people seem to support and expect equal sharing of the care responsibilities between the parents in the future (Lepola, 2018; Lindroos et al. 2020; Myllyniemi & Haikkola, 2020). On the other hand, it seems that young people take it for granted that mothers are primarily responsible for family and childcare (Hollström-Mikkonen et al., 2020; Kärmeniemi & Mörönen, 2017; Närvi, 2017b; Rotkirch et al., 2017; Sihvonen et al. 2020). In other words, perceptions of men's and women's work seem to follow traditional and stereotypical divisions. These perceptions are reflected to girls' and boys' dream jobs, which are highly gender segregated (Teräsaho & Keski-Petäjä, 2017).

Sinikka Aapola-Kari (2017) points out that it is challenging to compare different surveys of young people's values and attitudes as questions are usually formed differently in different studies and choices of words may influence how young people interpret questions and answer options. Contradictory results concerning attitudes towards sharing the family and work life responsibilities can be partially explained by Aapola-Kari's notices, as some of the studies (Myllyniemi & Haikkola 2020; Rotkirch et al. 2017; Närvi 2017b; Lindroos et al., 2020) are based on surveys. However, there could also be a conflict between ideals and reality concerning work-care reconciliation and sharing care responsibilities.

Parents who have had their first child at young age seem to be 'family oriented' by their values (Lammi-Taskula, 2007; Närvi, 2017b; Paajanen, 2005). For example in Finland, mothers under 30 years of age have argued more frequently than others that their motive to use the home care allowance was the view that the mother of a young child should be at home (Närvi, 2017b). Mothers under 30 years of age tend to emphasize mothercare as a justification for mother's take-up of parental leave and similarly, young parents and especially fathers emphasize father's breadwinning responsibilities (Lammi-Taskula 2007). It could be that emphasizing conservative values with family responsibilities can produce cultural and social capital and resources for young parents and that these can replace economical and educational capital and resources in young parents' lives (Sihvonen et al. 2020).

In Sweden, an interview study (Gillberg 2010) about young people's attitudes toward working life, revealed that more young women than men felt that starting a family meant restrictions on their lives. Young people expected that family formation will affect their future professional careers, women emphasize this statement more than men (Evertsson & Boye 2013).

In a similar vein, Sørensen et. al (2016) found that Danish university college students expected their lives to change when becoming parents. In this study however no statistically significant difference was observed between men and women in relation to their expectations of a poorer status on the labour market as well as worse economic situation in general when having children.

These studies raise the important issue of young parents' lived experience of everyday life: their perceptions and ideologies concerning work and family responsibilities need to be seen as a production and reflections of wider societal structures and circumstances. Young parents are in various life situations (Paajanen 2005; Sihvonen et al. 2020) and this diversity requires attention in social and educational policy settings. The transition to parenthood, and the parental practices are framed by not only young age and gender but also social class, and ethnicity (Peltola 2020).

Family and social policies supporting family formation

The role of family policy is often mentioned as relevant for supporting family formation, but there is little previous research focusing on this especially in the lives of young adults. Some examples can however be mentioned.

Based on interviews with young adults in Norway, Ellingsæter and Pedersen (2013) found that family policy schemes were included in the specific assessments surrounding the choice to have children. At the same time, knowledge of these schemes seemed to be limited. Although many were grateful for such arrangements, the collection of information often begins only after the pregnancy is a fact. The fact that the schemes are not consciously involved in the decision making shows that parental leave and kindergartens are institutionalized as part of young adults' expectations and are taken for granted.

In Iceland, a family-friendly student loan system can be considered an incentive for young people with children to seek education or to have a child while studying. According to the Eurostudent survey (2021), one in every three university students have children in Iceland, which is the highest proportion in Europe.

Korsell and Duvander (2019) examined how two different increases in the basic level of parental benefit, which were enacted in 2002 and 2013, affected continued childbearing and employment in Sweden. They used data from 1996-2013 including individuals between 20 and 40 years of age. The results show that the increased basic-level compensation delayed the entry into paid work for women with no work before having their first child, but the increase did not affect continued childbearing. They conclude that a relatively significant and sudden reduction of the difference between the parental benefit levels can lead to a somewhat delayed entry or return to employment after a first child, because a smaller difference between the benefit levels reduces the incentive for being in employment.

In Sweden, students are granted basic level compensation if they do not have a high income from earlier that can refer back to. It is in some cases possible to have earnings-related benefit if the parent had employment before starting their studies. To make it easier for women and men with children under the age of 18 to study, the student can apply for additional grants on top of regular study grants. In 2020, 113 100 (20 per cent) of students with study grants received additional grants for children (CSN 2021), 80 per cent of those were women. It is possible to receive student grants also for adults who complete the basic or secondary level, and among these students the share who receive the additional grant for children is considerably larger than among students at tertiary level education.

Parental leave schemes in the Nordic countries

Development of leave policies

Maternity leave was introduced as early as 1909 in Norway, and in the 1960's it was part of the social insurance scheme of all Nordic countries, aiming at giving the mother an opportunity to prepare for and recover from giving birth and to care for the newborn. Since the 1970's, the development of leave rights has been characterised by the aim of more equal sharing of childcare responsibility between mothers and fathers. Sweden was the first country in the world in 1974 to introduce parental leave for both parents in order to promote the reconciliation of paid employment and family life for all parents. Norway and Finland followed soon and gave fathers the right to a short paternity leave to support the father-child relationship and to help a mother who has just given birth. This signaled a new political view of fathers' responsibility and participation in care, in addition to mothers having the opportunity to combine participation in working life and participation in care (Duvander & Lammi-Taskula 2010; Kitterød et al. 2017; Kvande & Brandth 2020).

While during the 1980's Nordic fathers could use the gender-neutral parental leave, this longer leave was mainly taken by mothers which was detrimental to their position in the labour market. To further gender equality, an individual and non-transferable leave was introduced in the Nordic countries only for fathers. It was argued that the father's quota would give a strong signal to parents and employers that men as well as women are parents with obligations and rights as caregivers (Kvande & Brandth 2020). It was argued that in addition to contributing to gender equality in working life, fathers' take-up of more leave would also strengthen the relationship between father and child (Brandth and Kvande 2013). In other words, more equal sharing of parental leave was considered to be an advantage for both the mothers, the children and the fathers themselves.

Norway and Sweden were forerunners in the 1990's in promoting fathers' active participation in childcare by introducing the father's quota, and in the beginning of the 2000's Iceland took the lead in the length of the quota (Eydal & Gíslason 2008; Duvander et al 2019). In the Icelandic 3+3+3 model, each parent was granted three months of non-transferable leave in addition to three months that parents could divide as they chose within the child's first 18 months. This was a radical change, as it involved a longer universal father's quota than was seen in other countries at that time, and the economic compensation was high by international standards (Moss & O'Brien, 2006).

In Finland, the father's quota was legislated much later than in the other Nordic countries and in Denmark it was only in place 1998-2001 but will be re-introduced following the EU Parental leave directive. Also, in Finland and Norway child home care by mothers has been more strongly institutionalized with a cash-for-care benefit (Child Home Care Allowance) that is provided as an alternative to publicly subsidized day care services (Sipilä et al 2010; Duvander & Ellingsaeter 2016, Teigen & Skjeie 2017; Närvi et al 2020).

Current leave schemes (2021)

In 2021, all Nordic countries had some part of the childcare-related leave reserved for each parent (Table 3). In Finland and Norway, some months of maternity leave were reserved for the mother in relation to childbirth, while in Sweden this leave was only two weeks and in Denmark and Iceland there was no separate maternity leave. However, a quota for the mother existed in Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. A short paternity leave for fathers was provided in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, while a longer father's quota existed in all other countries but not in Denmark where leave quotas are agreed upon in many collective agreements. The shortest version of the father's quota was two months in Finland and the longest five months in Iceland.

Almost one year of leave after childbirth was compensated with a relatively high benefit (around 70-80 per cent of previous earnings), but also top-ups up to full earnings may be paid according to the work contract and collective agreement. In addition, a leave period with a lower flat-rate benefit was provided in Finland, Norway and Sweden. Parents in Iceland and Norway also had a possibility for an unpaid leave period.

Table 3. Maternity, paternity and parental leave in the Nordic countries 2021 (weeks)

	pregnancy /maternity leave	paternity leave	non-trans-ferable pa- rental leave quota for mother	non-trans-ferable pa- rental leave quota for fa- ther	transferable parental leave	transferable parental /childcare leave with flat-rate benefit	unpaid paren- tal leave
Denmark		2	18		32		
Finland	13			9	20	109	
Iceland			20	20	8		35
Norway	3	2	15/19*	15/19*	16/18*	52	52
Sweden	2	1,5	13	13	30	13	

*Choice of 80 % (instead of 100 %) wage compensation increases the leave length

The total length of leave is longest in Norway and Finland (2-3 years) due to the long flat-rate benefit period offered as an alternative to public daycare services. In Denmark and Iceland, the total leave is one year long while Sweden offers a three-month flat-rate leave period after 13 months of parental leave.

Flexible take-up of parental leave is possible in all Nordic countries. One of the main rationales for increasing flexibility during the years has been to make leave more attractive to fathers (Brandth and Kvande 2013). Flexibility includes part-time leave, which means that part-time work can be combined with part-time leave as well as possibility to postpone the leave e.g. due to full-time work, illness or vacation. Parents can also either take all the leave at once or divide it into shorter intervals. For example in Norway, parental leave days can be used until the child is three years old and in Sweden until the child is eleven. In Iceland and Sweden, parents can also use part of parental leave simultaneously (but not the quota) while in Finland only one parent at a time can be on parental leave (with the exception of the short paternity leave). In all countries, single parents can use both leave quotas.

Eligibility to parental leave and benefits is based on residence in Finland, while in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Iceland there are various employment criteria. However, parents with little or no previous employment will receive basic-level compensation during leave.

There is a ceiling of parental benefits in all countries but not in Finland. Changes in the ceiling have been used as austerity measures especially in Iceland. While before the financial crisis the ceiling was high and only three per cent of fathers and one per cent of mothers in Iceland had salaried earnings above it (Eydal & Gíslason, 2008), it was lowered severely in 2008 and 2009, which affected fathers' leave use. The ceiling has been somewhat restored but not to the pre-crisis level. As a consequence of a low ceiling, parents with precarious labour market position receive relatively low payments compared even to the minimum wage level. However, there are various support measures for students who have a child, for example in Denmark female students are entitled to 12 months' and male students to six months' extra study grant.

Take-up of leave by fathers

The take-up of parental leave by fathers as well as participation of fathers in daily care for their children has slowly increased in countries that have a statutory leave quota for fathers (Figure 11). For example in Iceland and Sweden, fathers take about 30 per cent of total leave days. This is also reflected in childcare practices: two decades after the quota was implemented in Iceland the vast majority of parents report an equal division of care for their firstborn child, one to three years after childbirth (Arnalds, Eydal, & Gíslason, 2013; Arnalds, 2020). Take-up of leave by fathers is lowest (11 per cent of all leave days) in Denmark and in Finland. In

Denmark, there was a significant increase in the share of fathers that take paternity leave when a father's quota was introduced for a shorter period, and likewise, the rate dropped when the father's quota was abolished (Rostgaard and Lausten, 2016; Rostgaard and Ejrnæs, 2021). In Finland the lower use may be related to the fact that the quota was introduced more recently than in the other Nordic countries (Miettinen et al 2021).

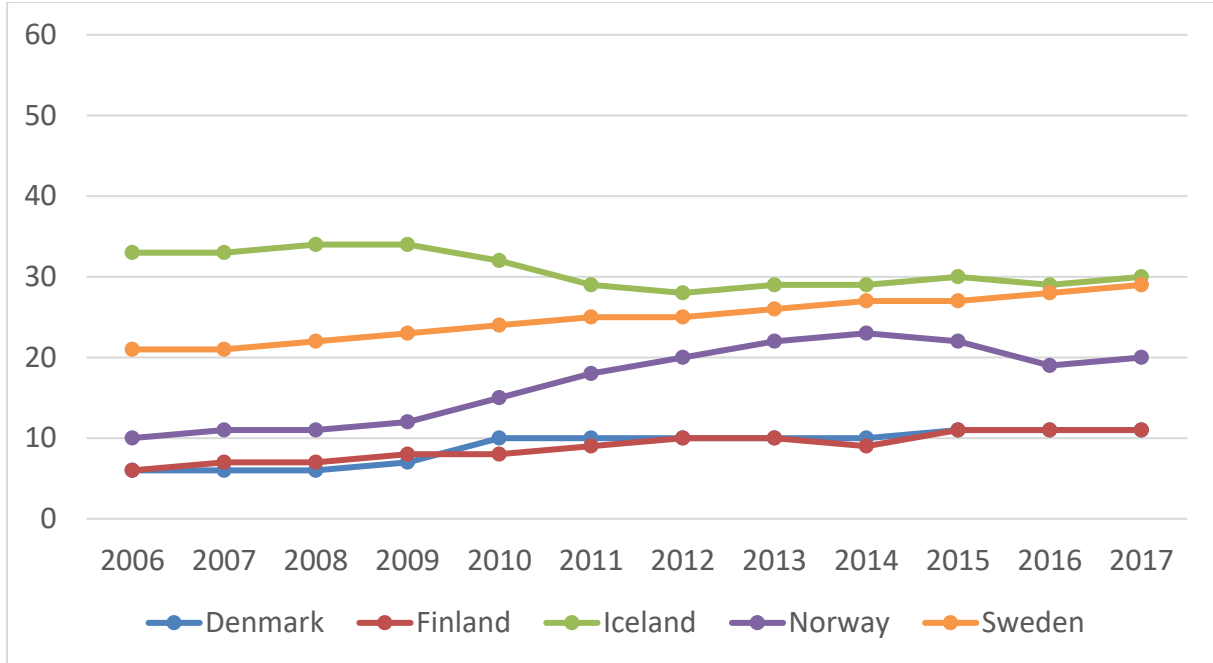


Figure 11. Share of parental leave benefit days taken by men in the Nordic countries 2006-2017 (%)

Parental leave use among young parents in the Nordic countries

Previous research on the take-up of parental leave by young parents in the Nordic countries is relatively scarce and scattered. In this chapter, the overview of statistics and research is given separately for each country. Additional analysis of existing register data was conducted for Sweden and Iceland.

Denmark

In an interview study, Bloksgaard (2011) argues that the take up of leave by Danish fathers is highly dependent on the sector and specific company they are employed in. The complexity of navigating in a situation where leave is something to be negotiated rather than something one has the right to can lead to parents not being able to figure out what they are entitled to, possibly leading to less take up of leave.

In terms of these gendered perceptions surrounding leave, Bloksgaard (2011) showed that fathers with young children who were members of the United Federation of Danish Workers held rather traditional views of family practices and saw parental leave as something reserved for women.

In their analysis of interviews with young Danish men, Malling et. al. (2020) found cultural gendered hinderance in terms of actually taking up leave: young men tended to believe that men who asked for paternity leave were looked down on in certain occupational fields.

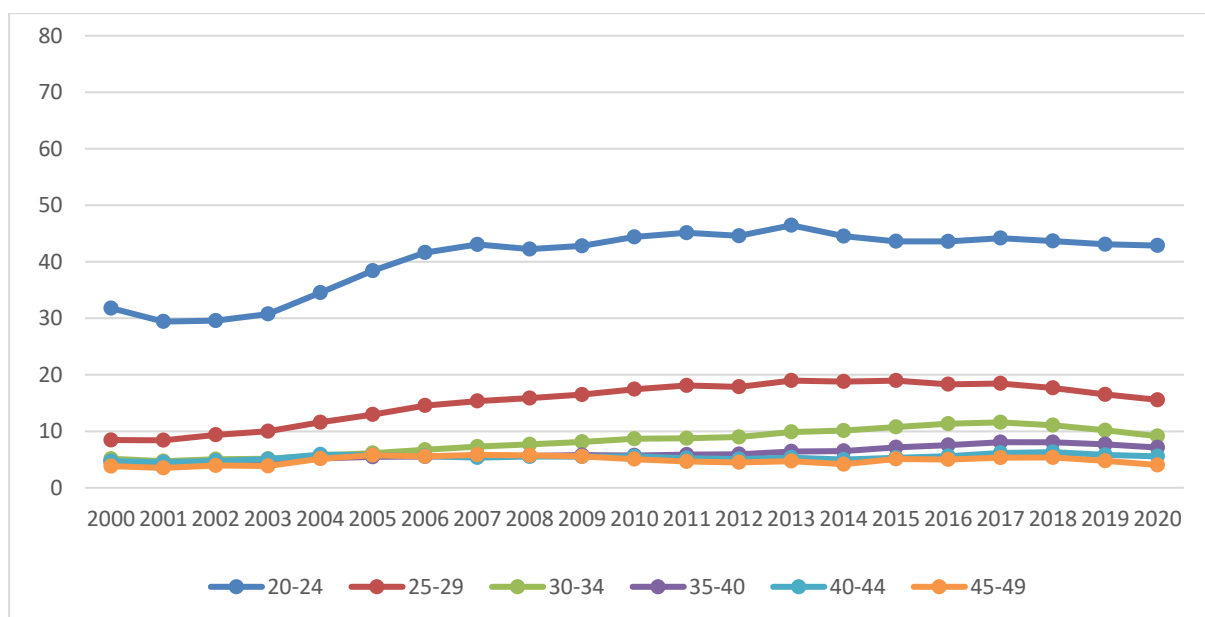
In terms of cultural perceptions, Rostgaard and Ejrnæs (2021) show the paradox that Danish men and women are – in overall terms – even more supportive of gender quality when it comes to work-family life sharing than their Nordic peers, even though Denmark does not have a universal father's quota for parental leave.

Sweden

When comparing younger to older parents, claiming parental benefit at the basic level is more common among the young, and especially among young women. Basic level compensation is given instead of earnings-related compensation if the parent has not worked at least 240 consecutive days before birth to earn an income above the basic level (today SEK 250 per day).

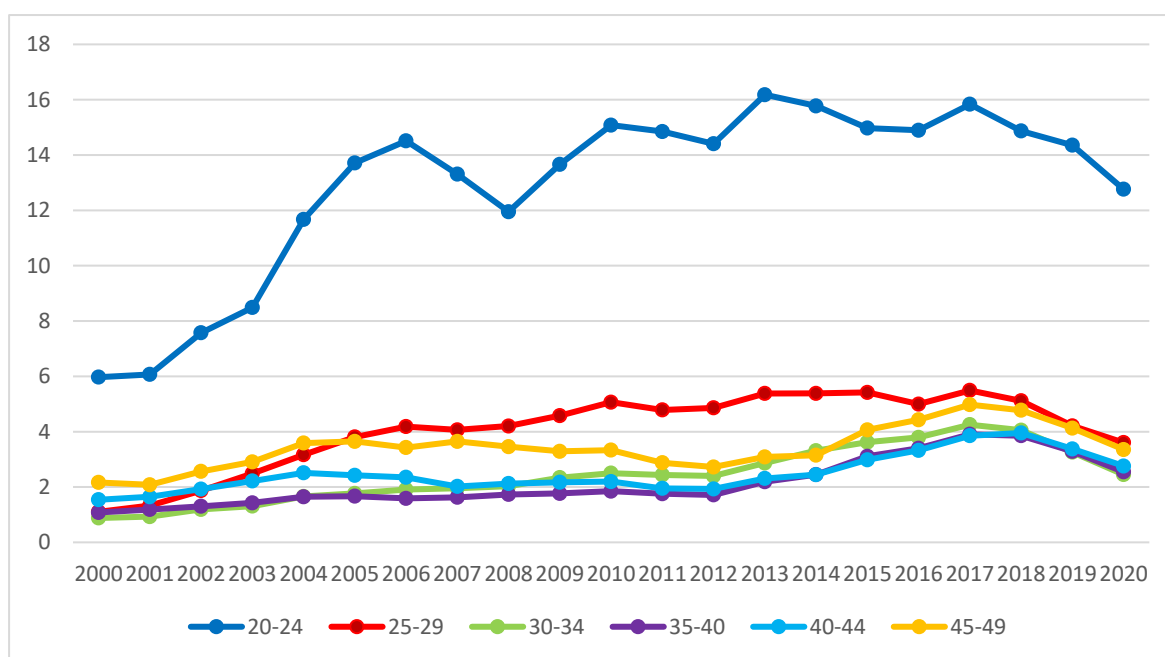
In a report by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (2012: 3) the uptake of parental benefit in Sweden is analyzed between 1974 and 2011. In 2011, just under a quarter of all days were paid out with a basic level of compensation for parents between the ages of 25 and 29. More than half of the earnings-related days were paid out at the corresponding basic level for parents under the age of 25. In comparison, the proportion of basic level compensation of older parents was about 10 per cent.

In 2002, the basic level compensation was increased from SEK 60 to SEK 120 per day. In the years 2003 and 2004, the basic level was raised again, first to SEK 150 and then to SEK 180 (Korsell & Duvander 2019). Figures 12 and 13 visualize how the proportion of days with compensation at the basic level has increased, especially in the younger age groups. Among the youngest age group of mothers aged 20-24 it is much more common to receive benefits at this level than for all other groups, and there is a clear age trend. The increase in the beginning of the 2000s has to do with the increased level of compensation and can, at least partly, be put down to an automatic effect of the increase. The same pattern is found for fathers but at a much lower level and also with less differentiation between age groups.



Data: Swedish Social Insurance Agency.

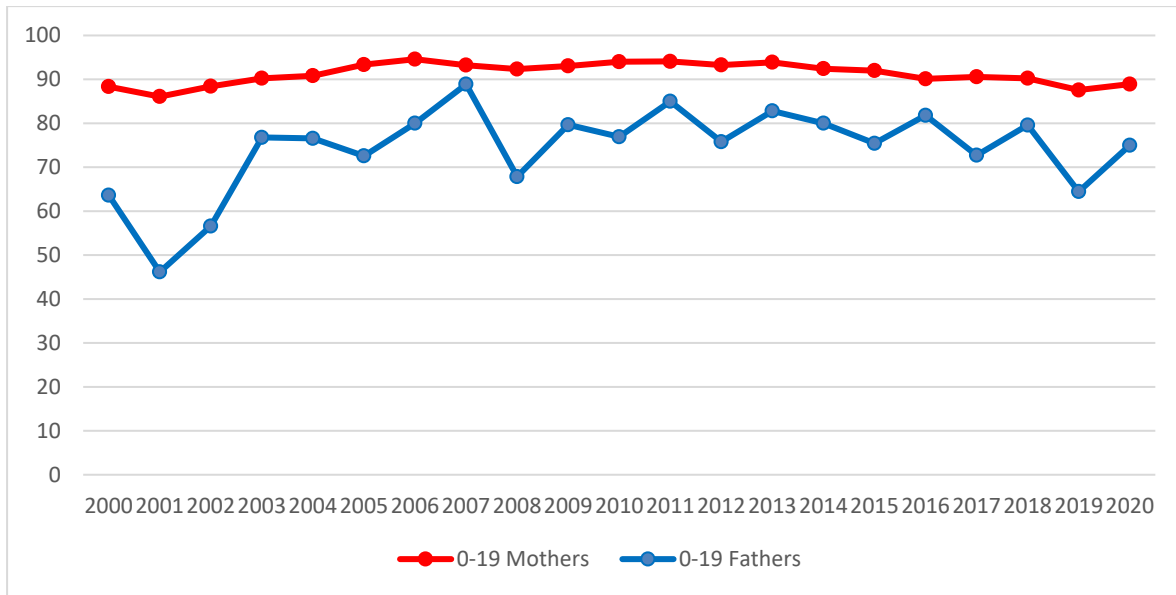
Figure 12. Proportion of basic level compensation by age group among mothers in Sweden, 2000-2020



Data: Swedish Social Insurance Agency.

Figure 13. Proportion of basic level compensation by age group among fathers in Sweden, 2000-2020

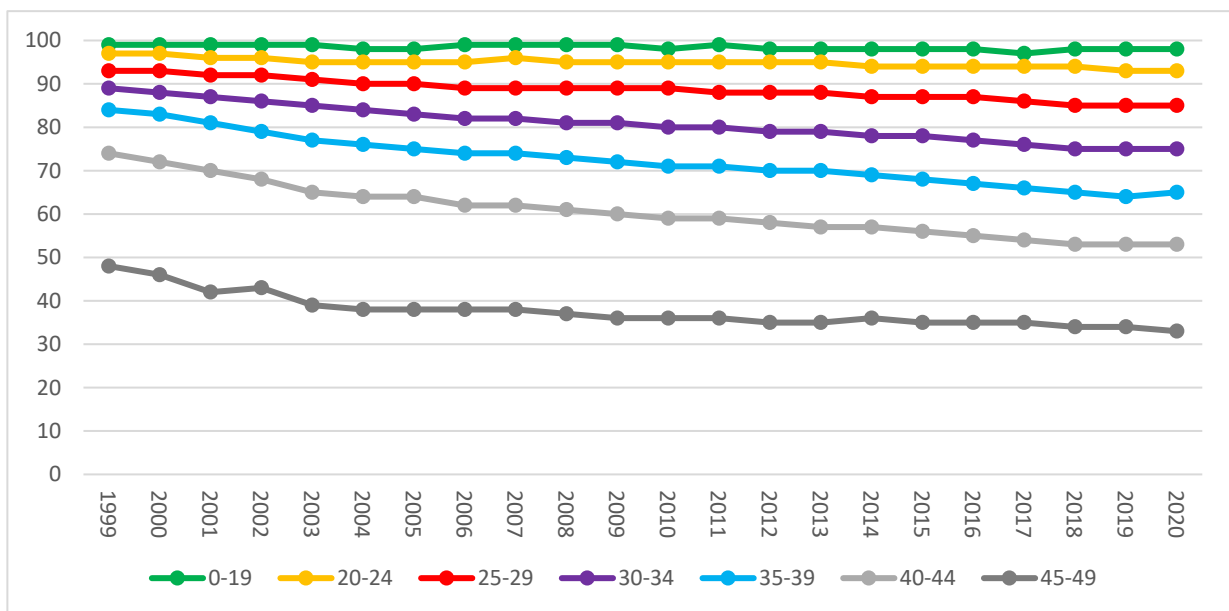
Figure 14 shows that the proportion of teenage fathers who have only claimed parental benefit at the basic level has fluctuated more than among teenage mothers. The fluctuations are likely caused by randomness as the group is very small. Teenage parents have a comparably high proportion of basic-level compensation, compared to the other age groups over the same time-period.



Data: Swedish Social Insurance Agency.

Figure 14. Proportion of basic level compensation, mothers and fathers under 20 in Sweden, 2000-2020

In Figure 15, the proportion of parental leave that is taken by women by age group is shown. It is clear that among the young parents, women take a larger share of leave and that it is especially among the older parents that parents share leave equally.



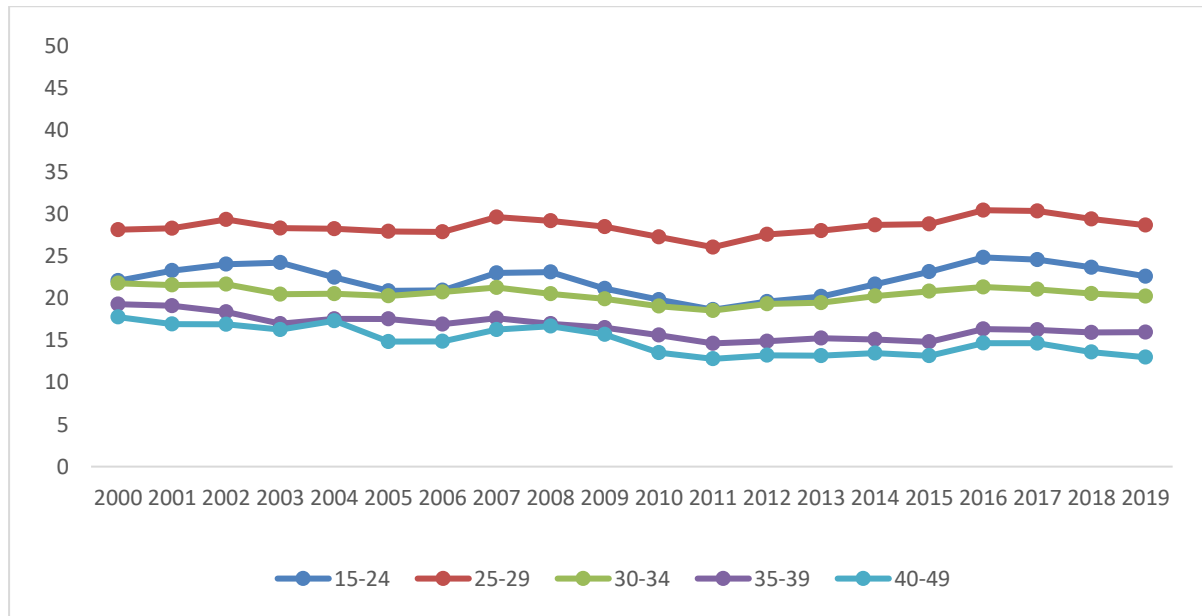
Data: Swedish Social Insurance Agency.

Figure 15. Proportion of parental leave taken by women per age group in Sweden, 1999-2020

Two thirds of a total of SEK 32,7 billion paid out in parental benefits in 2019 were claimed by women and one third by men (Social Insurance in Figures 2020). Berggren (2004) analysed strategies for parental leave use for mothers and fathers of children born in 1999. The study was based on an interview survey (n=4000) of children born in 1993 and 1999, which was further linked to register information on parental income and the use of social insurance schemes. Multivariate, multinomial regression was used to explain parental leave length, divided into three groups (up to 13 months, between 13 and 19 months, and more than

19 months). The results show that the younger the mother is, the more likely she is to be in the group that takes less or equal to than 13 months of parental leave. The reverse is true for fathers. Berggren (2004) figures that this could be due to the fact that younger mothers are not established on the labour market to the same extent as older mothers, thus wanting to return to the paid employment faster to strengthen their position.

If a pregnant woman has a physically demanding work, or if her work is dangerous to her or the child she is entitled to a pregnancy benefit during the later stages of the pregnancy. This benefit is paid for a maximum of 50 days during the last two months of the pregnancy (Swedish Social Insurance Agency 2020). As is shown in Figure 16, the age group 25-29 has the highest proportion of women who receive pregnancy benefit.



Data: Swedish Social Insurance Agency.

Figure 16. Percentage of women who have received pregnancy benefit of total births per age group in Sweden, 2000-2019

Based on a study using administrative data of first-born children in 2009, Duvander and Viklund (2019) found that younger mothers use more benefit days, although the difference in overall length of leave is smaller than the actual benefit days between age groups. This is explained by young mothers more often using benefit days for all days they are on leave while older mothers often stretch the leave and include unpaid days. Young mothers also more often have sole custody of their children, which also limits their flexibility of leave outtake. This is further confirmed by Swedish Social Insurance Agency (2018); the opportunity to use the flexibility of the parental leave differs based on income level where parents with lower income levels for financial reasons need to spend most days during the child's first year and thus do not have the opportunity to save days for when the child is older.

In a report by the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (2021) based on register data from 2018, it is stated that almost twice as many foreign-born young women are on parental leave (approximately 11 per cent) compared with Swedish-born young women (just under 5 per cent). It is evident that young foreign-born women are on parental leave to a much greater extent than any other group, however this too seems to be moderated by age of immigration. Young women who immigrated before the age of 17 more commonly have parental benefit as their sole income compared to those who immigrated before the age of 17 (MUCF 2021). Furthermore, the country of origin is of importance regarding young women's parental leave uptake. Among young (20-29) Swedish-born women, 5 per cent had their main income from parental benefit in 2018. For women born in the Nordic countries, the EU 28 and South America, it is just as common (5 per cent) and among women born in North America it is less common to be on parental leave compared to Swedish-born women. Young women from Africa are to a greater extent on parental leave (17

per cent), while women from Europe (excluding the Nordic countries and EU countries) (12 per cent), and Asia (12 per cent) are on leave almost as often.

Ma et al. (2020) used individual-level and longitudinal register data between 1993-2010 to analyze men's parental leave uptake between 1993 and 2010. The results shows that almost 80 per cent of all fathers that are 25 or younger take out two months or less of parental leave, while the proportion among fathers between 26 and 30 is 68 per cent. The overall results from this study was that the relative trends of parental leave use for different age groups of fathers were very similar during the early period of 1993-2002. After 2002, clear differences emerged. The youngest fathers in particular lagged behind in the development towards an increasing use of parental leave. The finding holds also when differences in education and income are considered.

Thalberg (2013) found that female students in Sweden had much greater knowledge about the parental leave insurance system than male students, they also took parental leave and their benefit into account and planned for it to a greater extent than men.

Finland

Mothers use a substantial share of parental leave days in Finland. Thus, parental leave has a highly greater role in young women's school to work process than in men's (Ristikari et al., 2016).

According to the statistics of the Social Insurance Institute in Finland, the share of fathers among parental leave benefit receivers has grown during the past decade from 35 per cent in 2020 to 42 per cent in 2019. However, in the group of young adults under 25, the share of fathers is much smaller: 17 per cent in 2020 and 21 per cent in 2019. This means that the take-up of leave is much more common among older fathers in Finland (Kela 2010; 2019).

Statistical findings indicate that mother's age have some effect on the length of the mother's take-up of leave. Mothers who are 25-30 years old seem to use home care allowance for shorter time periods than younger or older parents (Haataja & Juutilainen, 2014; Närvi, 2017b; Salmi et al., 2009), although there is some evidence that under 26-year-old mothers spend less time at home with their first child than older mothers (Räsänen et al., 2019). According to Haataja and Juutilainen (2014), mothers who are 25 years old or younger use more rarely long, and more often short periods of home care allowance.

While age has some effect on young mothers' leave take-up patterns, the patterns are mostly explained by the mothers' labour market position. Johanna Närvi's (2017b) findings indicate that mothers' young age (under 30 years) together with an insecure labour market status reduces the mothers' probability to use home care allowance for a long period of time (also Kuitto et al., 2019). According to Närvi's (2017b) conclusions, mother's labour market position has three effects on her take-up of leave. First, an insecure labour market position (experiences of unemployment, fixed term employment or insecurity of work) speeds up the mother's returning to work after the birth, but only if the mother has a job to return to. Second, if the mother's labour market position is weak but she does not have a job to return to, it is likely that she will use home care allowance for a longer time. Third, between these groups are the mothers, who have a job and who do not see their labour market position as insecure or weak. These mothers have a possibility to choose the time they spend at home more freely.

In other words, the opportunity to use parental benefits means different things to different group of mothers and hence it is a question of equality. For more privileged mothers in terms of education and work status, the parental leave system enhances their freedom of choice while other mothers have less options; for them, the home care allowance manifests itself as a legitimate alternative to unemployment (Lammi-Taskula, 2004). Närvi (2014) has also raised the question of inequality between mothers in her other study. The factor that distinguishes mothers also in Närvi's (2014) study is the mothers' labour market position: mothers who had jobs returned to work more quickly after the birth than mothers who did not have jobs (also Salmi et al., 2017). Interestingly, the labour market position remained significant in Närvi's (2014) analysis even after controlling respondents' attitudes on the gender division of care responsibilities.

This issue of unequal opportunities of arranging care and work concerns especially young mothers as they are more often in insecure or weak labour market positions than older mothers. However, it is worth noticing that mothers over 30 years of age may face different kinds of challenges regarding the freedom of choice as

their job's nature might prevent them from cutting down the work hours even when one wishes to do so (Salmi et al., 2016).

There is quite strong evidence indicating that young fathers share parental leave with mothers less equally than older fathers (Lammi-Taskula, 2003, 2007; Närvi, 2018; Salmi et al., 2009). Father's higher age seems to increase the overall probability that the father will use his parental leave quota (Lammi-Taskula, 2007; Lammi-Taskula et al., 2017; Närvi, 2018; Takala, 2005). Higher age raises also the probability that the father will take up some of the transferable parental leave (Lammi-Taskula et al., 2017; Närvi, 2018).

Similarly to mothers' socio-economic patterns of leave take-up, the fathers' leave take-up is also strongly associated with the labour market status. Fathers who take more than just a minimum paternity leave are often in a good socio-economic position while it is more common not to take parental leave at all among fathers who are outside the labour market (Närvi, 2018). Also, student fathers seem to take parental leave more rarely than working fathers (Hämäläinen & Takala, 2007) which may seem surprising as one would expect them to have more equal ideals of parenthood in general.

In a study on immigrant fathers' take-up of parental leave in Finland and Sweden, Tervola et al. (2016) found out that the fathers in the age group 25-29 years were more likely to take simultaneous leave with the mother than 30-34-year-old fathers. However, age was not a significant factor when predicting immigrant fathers' take-up of fathers' individual leave. Overall, the authors conclude that policy designs in Finland and Sweden have a surprisingly large effect on immigrant fathers' take-up patterns.

A recent study (Eerola et al 2019) suggests that the father's work, his partner's education, and family income, along with the father's wish to take a break from work and wish to facilitate the mother's return to work or studies, are the key characteristics and motivations associated with fathers' take-up of leave. In this study, the fathers' age, level of education, and health were not related to leave take-up.

Fathers often report supporting their partner's return to work or studies as one of the motives to take parental; Lammi-Taskula et al., 2017; Rotkirch et al., 2017). Sharing parental leave with the mother is also associated with the father's less stereotypic attitudes of work and family responsibilities (Salmi et al., 2009). Studies indicate that young men and fathers appreciate family life and want to spend time at home with their children (Hollström-Mikkonen et al., 2020; Lainiala, 2014; Lammi-Taskula et al., 2017). The narratives of participative and caring father appear more common with young and urban fathers (Eerola 2009). However, ideals and values do not always meet the reality: family may be important in young men's narratives, but stories of work-family reconciliation are still constructed in rather traditional ways (Hollström-Mikkonen et al. 2020).

When promoting young fathers' take-up of leave it is important to consider gendered attitudes in working life towards care responsibilities. Compared to older fathers, young fathers receive more often negative comments from their superiors regarding their plans to use the father's leave quota (Närvi 2017a). Also, according to the Finnish Gender Equality Barometer (Attila et al 2018), employees under 35 years of age find it more difficult to take-up parental leave at their workplace as compared to older employees.

In general, people in Finland seem to support women's employment, but not necessarily the increase of men's caring responsibilities (Rotkirch et al., 2017; Salin et al., 2016). Increasing the father's leave quota is considered unnecessary more often by middle-aged than young people (Lindholm, 2012). These findings are similar with Paula England's (2010) analysis of the gender equality's halt: while women have entered men's life arena (paid work), men have not taken equivalent steps towards responsibilities of home and care.

Iceland

Analysis of data from the Icelandic Parental leave fund for parents who had a child in 2019 shows that the youngest group of parents, those under the age of 25, are least likely to receive the income related benefits. Here, a more detailed analysis was possible. Income related benefits were less common especially among young mothers, as 77 per cent of mothers under the age of 25 received income related benefits, compared to 86 to 93 per cent of mothers in the older age groups. On the other hand, young mothers were more likely than the older ones to receive fixed benefits for students and fixed benefits for parents working less than 25 per cent (Figure 17).

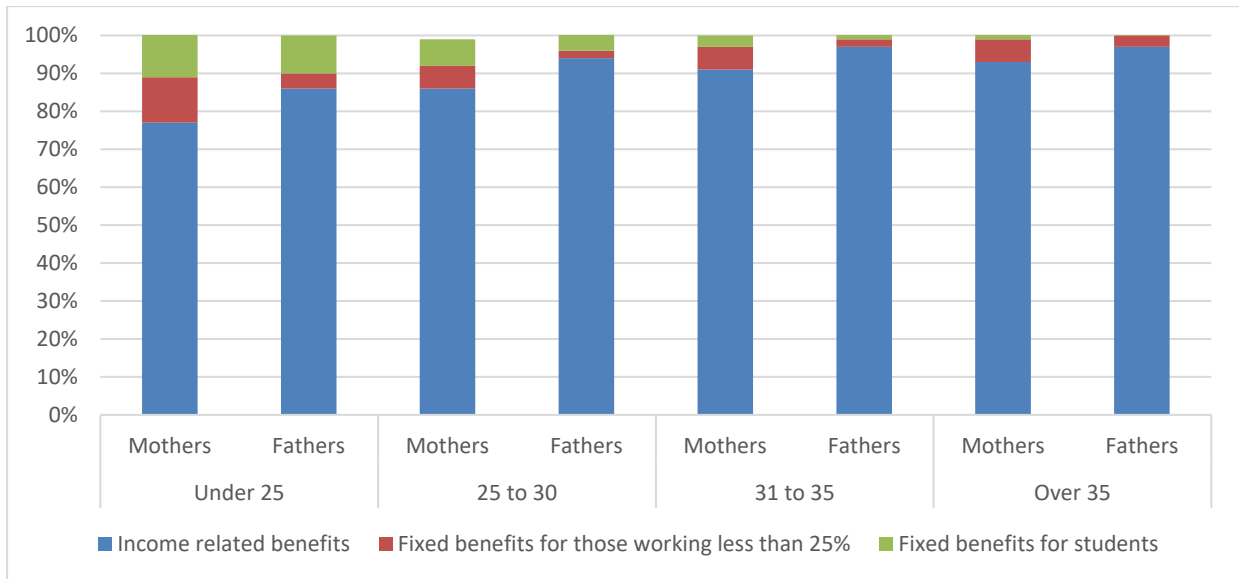


Figure 17. Type of parental leave benefits received by parents who had a child in Iceland 2019

The average number of leave days used by young mothers and fathers who had a child in Iceland in 2019 was similar to that of parents over the age of 30 (Figure 18). Fathers, regardless of age, used around 90 days on average, while mothers used around 180 days on average. The numbers indicate that fathers mainly used the fathers’ quota, while most mothers used the mothers’ quota and the three months that parents could divide as they wish.

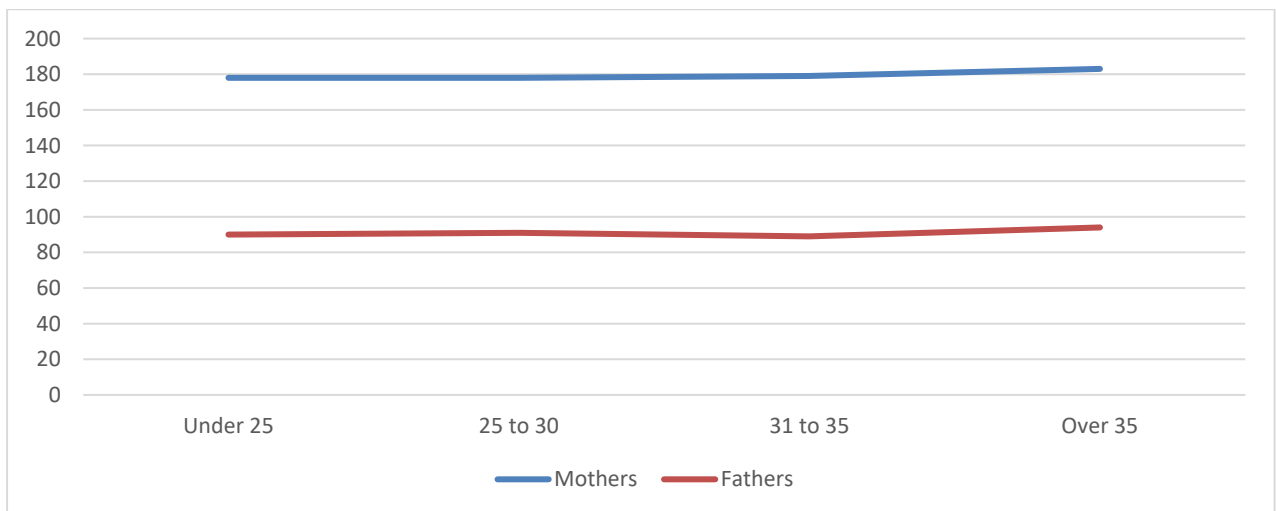


Figure 18: Average number of leave days used by parents who had a child in 2019 in Iceland

There are however differences in leave use among young parents in Iceland according to citizenship, the type of benefits, and income (Figure 19). Fathers with a non-European citizenship use the least amount of days, on average, while mothers who were non-European citizens used a longer leave than mothers from Iceland and other European countries. The type of benefit as well as income have a greater impact on leave use among mothers than among fathers. Mothers who received income related benefits used more leave than those who received a fixed amount due to part-time work or being a student. However, mothers in the highest income group used the least amount of leave with income related benefits.

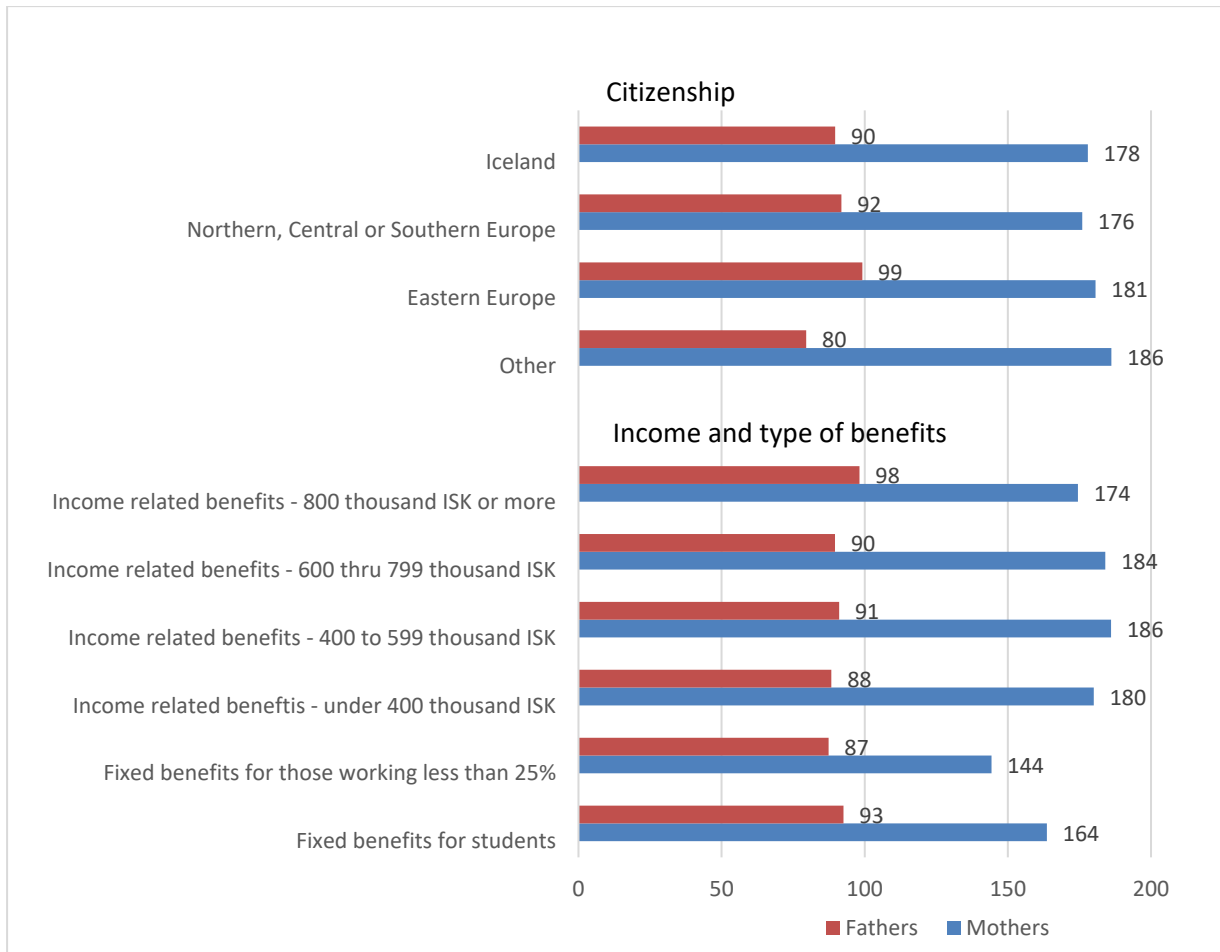


Figure 19: Average number of leave days used by parents, under the age of 31, who had a child in 2019 in Iceland, according to citizenship and type of benefits

In sum, data from the Icelandic Parental leave fund show that young parents are in a more precarious position than older parents, as they are less likely to receive income related benefits. However, age does not impact the length of leave used by parents. When taking a closer look at how young parents use the leave, the data shows that mothers with fixed benefits for those working less than 25 per cent used the shortest leave, while mothers receiving income related benefits close to the ceiling used the longest leave on average.

Norway

Research from Norway on the socioeconomic class differences in possibilities to take parental leave show that women in working class jobs are particularly concerned that the paid parental leave is long enough and the compensation high enough that they can take care of the child themselves in the first year (Ellingsaeter & Pedersen 2013). As these women have often worked for many years before they have children, a long leave is not perceived as a risk in relation to the job. Not all fathers experience that their income is sufficient to support children, and overtime and extra work may be necessary. The structures of working life can stand in the way of parenthood for those who belong to working-class jobs: far more often than for those in middle-class jobs, working hours are outside the norm working day, and time flexibility is more limited (Ellingsaeter 2009). The informants in this study experience that these time structures cannot be combined with the kindergarten's opening hours, and that a change in the working hours scheme is necessary to facilitate children.

For women in the upper middle class, having children and taking a long leave of absence can be perceived as a risk in terms of work and career prospects. This is one of the reasons why some people postpone having children. Men who belong to this stratum do not think of this phase as any kind of risk when it comes to their

own job prospects. They are concerned about the partner's leave, but long absences for their own part are not an issue. Some fathers opt out of jobs with unlimited time requirements and prioritize the family through a better time balance between work and family (Ellingsæter and Pedersen 2013).

Fathers who are self-employed are less likely to use the father's quota than fathers with a fixed income from work (Fougner 2009). At the same time, they rarely take out more than the weeks reserved for the father. This may be due to a financial loss to the family. Parental benefits can result in a greater financial loss for fathers who are self-employed than for fathers who are employees. This is especially true if the father works more hours than a normal working week, and in addition is careful about taking out his own salary.

Secondly, it can be difficult to be away from the workplace when you are self-employed. When the company is under development, the father's knowledge, ideas and work effort can be decisive for the daily operation. At the same time, there can be few or no employees that can take over the work tasks. Thirdly, fathers who are self-employed may be less likely to be entitled to the father's quota than fathers who are employees. If the father is careful about taking out his own salary, he may be without the right to parental benefits.

Fourthly, it is about the mother's work situation. The probability that the father will take out more than six weeks of paternity leave is highest when both mother and father have a high income. When both mother and father have a high level of education and a high income, both parents will lose out financially on taking out parental benefits. Both will be visible in their workplace and take care of their own careers. The mother's affiliation may have an effect on how strongly she wants to encourage the father to take out more than the father's quota.

Parental leave rights seem to create strong emotional reactions among freelancers (Ramborg et al. 2016). Permanent employment is required for the last six months in order to receive paid parental leave. The benefit received while on parental leave is related to previous earnings and not to the employment itself. This means that a freelancer is entitled to paid parental leave and fathers' quota if he or she has been employed for a certain period. The problem is related to the fact that freelancers may be at risk of receiving far less paid parental leave than they could have received in the first place because their income can vary from month to month.

Grambo and Myklebø (2009) studied the division of parental leave between parents, whether they use the possibilities for flexible parental leave, and what factors the parents emphasize when they distribute the leave time between them. In the vast majority of parental couples in the study, both the mother and the father had earned the right to parental benefit. However, young parents were overrepresented among the cases where only one of the parents or none had the right to paid parental leave. Among mothers under 25 years of age, only 65 per cent of the parental couples were entitled to parental benefits. This can be related to the fact that many in this age group are still in education or have recently started working, and thus have not earned the right to paid parental leave (Grambo and Myklebø 2009).

Fougner (2009) found that the father had more often earned the right to paid parental leave when the mother also had this right. This has to do with the fact that the mother and father are younger when the mother does not have the right to paid parental leave. Young fathers will often not meet the requirement of having had income for six out of ten months before the parental leave. Furthermore, mothers without the right to paid parental leave are mainly young, often with little education and work experience.

It appears from Lappegård (2003) that the father's age is more important than the mother's age for the father's use of parental leave. The father's share of the leave period increases when the child is first born, when the father's age increases, the father is married and when he does not have an immigrant background. This result may be an indication that the father has individual preferences in relation to the use of parental leave related to his age.

Danielsen and Lappegård (2003) found that the proportion who have earned the right to paid parental leave varies according to the woman's age. It is greatest among women in the age group 30-34 years, while it is the same for women in the age groups 25-29 years and those over 35 years. The lower proportion among the youngest is related to the fact that many of the young people will be in education when they have children.

According to Bergsvik, Kitterød and Wiik (2016), unmarried couples have a higher chance of having an equal or untraditional breadwinning pattern compared to married couples. In the small group of couples where the woman is older than the man there is more often an untraditional provider model than in the group

of couples where the parties are the same age. At the same time, there is a positive connection between the woman's age and having an equal or non-traditional provider model (Bergsvik, Kitterød and Wiik 2016).

It appears that more and more fathers are taking out father's quota in Norway. This development applies to all fathers, regardless of income and age. The reason why more fathers receive paid parental leave may be due to increased employment and an improved financial situation which has given more fathers the opportunity to earn the right to take paid parental leave through a stable employment relationship. (Fougner 2009.)

Taking parental leave beyond the father's quota has increased the most for young fathers aged 25-29 years and for fathers with an income below four times the basic amount (Fougner 2009). Young age and low income are associated with low education, short employment time and little work experience. Therefore, these fathers may be vulnerable in times of high unemployment. Fathers aged 35-39 often take out more than the father's quota. They also take longer periods with paid parental leave. Fathers younger than 25 years or 50 years and older are more likely to settle for six weeks father's quota compared with fathers aged 30-49 years old.

Fougner (2012) found that there was more fathers' who took paid parental leave after the father's quota was increased in 2009. The change applied regardless of the father's age. According to Fougner (2012), this is probably related to the fact that half of the new weeks of the expansion were taken from the sharable part of the parental leave.

Conclusions

Gender equality is a trademark for the Nordic countries. In particular, the family policy that is in place has enabled gender equality in the distribution of paid work and unpaid care between men and women in these countries. Looking at the young generations in the Nordic countries there seems to be a continuous – if not increasing – emphasis on gender equality. There is across the Nordic countries a high proportion of youth that support gender equality in terms of parenthood and work-life. However, the effect is more pronounced among young women than among young men and is also more pronounced among the highly educated youth compared with those with lower educational levels. Over time, Nordic young adults stand out in being less traditional in their gender attitudes than society at large.

When looking over time, gender attitudes in society at large seem in general to become less traditional, perhaps also under influence of the development of institutional factors such as affordable and high-quality early education and care. Our analysis of the European Values Study confirmed that even when controlling for differences in socio-demographic background, women in general are more in favor of gender equality in relation to family and work than men in the Nordic countries. Gender differences seem higher in Finland and Norway than in Denmark and Sweden. Having children also seem to affect gender attitudes so that parents have less gender egalitarian attitudes. Likewise, more traditional gender attitudes are related to lower educational levels, being born in another country and having more right-wing prone political beliefs, while employment status does not seem to influence gender attitudes.

In this report we have provided an overview of what is known of young parents' parental leave take-up in the Nordic countries as well as and young peoples' values, hopes and perceptions regarding parenthood and its' different dimensions including work-care reconciliation. In the following the main conclusions are summarised under the most relevant topics, and gaps in research are pointed out.

What kind of cultural conceptions are there concerning youth, adulthood, and parenthood?

Since the beginning of the 21st century, many researchers have addressed the issues of the transition from youth to adulthood and the preconditions of the transition. Some of the traditional indicators, such as marriage and children, seem to have lost their essentiality as milestones for the transition from youth to adulthood. Cultural researchers have focused on the issue of prolonged youth and there is literature that debates the existence and nature of the phenomenon.

Whereas transition from youth to adulthood is a liquid phase and hard to define, literature suggests that there are some preconditions for family formation that young people consider essential. These are mainly constructed through the stability of the different life arenas, such as work status, financial situation, and partnership.

Cultural conceptions of parenthood are mainly studied from the perspective of women. There seem to be quite strict and normative conceptions of the right timing of becoming a mother. Young mothers do not want to be seen as problems nor do they want that their lives are interpreted only negatively. Mothers' interpretations and perceptions of their lives are intertwined with age, social class, and ethnicity.

What kind of perceptions and hopes young people have about parenthood?

Although some of the traditional milestones of the transition from youth to adulthood have lost their centrality, evidence from the literature suggests that young people consider both work and family as highly important dimensions in their lives.

Findings concerning the sharing of family and work life responsibilities are somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, young people seem to support and expect equal sharing of the care responsibilities in the future but on the other hand, it seems that it is taken for granted that mothers are primarily responsible for family and childcare. Contradictory results in this review might be partially due to differently worded questions, but there could also be a conflict between ideals and reality.

How does precariousness affect young mothers' parental leave take-up?

Precariousness in the labour market impacts on women's timing of family formation and parental leave take up. A weak or insecure labour market position seems to polarize family formation as parents with fixed-term employment either have more children and earlier than average, or they do not have any children at all.

Mother's age seems to have some effect on the take-up of leave patterns but leave patterns are mostly explained by the mother's labour market status. The opportunity to use parental benefits means different things to different group of mothers and hence it is a question of equality. More privileged mothers in terms of education and employment have more opportunities to choose how long they stay at home and when they return to work life. This issue of unequal opportunities of arranging care and work concerns especially young mothers as they are more often in insecure or weak labour market positions than older mothers.

Do young parents share parental leave and care responsibilities more or less equally as compared to older parents?

There is quite strong evidence indicating that young fathers share parental leave with mothers less equally than older fathers. Father's higher age seems to increase the overall probability that father will use his parental leave quota as well as the probability that father will take-up some of the transferable parental leave with no-quota.

Like mothers' take-up of leave patterns, fathers' take-up patterns are also strongly associated to father's labour market status. Fathers who take more than just minimum paternity leave are often in a good socio-economic position. Father's work, his partner's education, and family income, along with the father's wish to take a break from work and wish to facilitate the mother's return to work or studies, are the key characteristics and motivations associated with fathers' take-up of leave.

Young men's narratives, hopes and perceptions of fatherhood are somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, they emphasize the value of the family and children as well as equal sharing of care responsibilities. On the other hand, however, young men seem to support rather traditional narratives and ideologies of work-care reconciliation. It is important to notice that ideologies and everyday practices of young families probably reflect their life circumstances and are related to wider societal structures. Young families do not necessarily have the same options than older parents to choose how they will share parental leave, due to their labour market position and income.

What are the research gaps in the literature?

During the research process, six apparent research gaps were identified:

First, there is no statistical literature concentrating on the issue of young parents' take-up of parental leave patterns in the sense that the whole research design would have been constructed round that issue. In order to make sense of the young parents leave patterns one has to scrutinize the regression tables from the attachments of research reports. This indicates that this issue has not been seen as particularly important. Although age was often used as a constant variable, it was common that the implications of age were not thoroughly discussed in the body of the text.

Second, there are only few studies that scrutinize the experiences, perceptions and expectations of young men and fathers; most of the studies on young parents dealt with perceptions and expectations of parenthood of young women or of young people in general. In the future it would be worthwhile to study the cultural conceptions of both motherhood and fatherhood in relation to prolonged youth or normative femininity/masculinity as well as cultural capital of young motherhood and fatherhood.

A third research gap seems to be a lack of literature comparing, for example, young mothers' and fathers' take-up of leave patterns in different policy schemes or young parents' interpretation of their everyday lives in different cultural contexts. Some comparative studies were found: Salin et al. (2016) studied people's attitudes towards equal sharing of work and care responsibilities in Finland, Sweden, Germany, France, Great Britain, and Spain. Tervola et al. (2016) studied policy designs and their implications to immigrants' gendered patterns of take-up of parental leave in Finland and Sweden. Mary (2012) studied young female university students' transition to adulthood and their socio-economic integration to society in Finland and France.

Fourthly, intersections of gender and socioeconomic status are represented in the literature sources quite comprehensively. Some studies also considered intersections of age, social class, and ethnicity in relation to motherhood (Kelhä, 2008; Peltola 2008; Sihvonen et al. 2020) as well as gender and ethnicity in relation to fathers' take-up of leave (Tervola et al. 2016). However, more research is needed, that will, for example, scrutinize the intersections of social class, ethnicity, disability, and place of residence in relation to leave take-up patterns as well as to cultural perceptions, values and hopes of parenthood.

Even though literature search was not restricted to heterosexual couples or cisgender people, the search process failed to capture studies that would have dealt with leave patterns or cultural conceptions and values of gender and sexual minorities. There is evidence that young people representing sexual minorities often have more difficulties in forming relationships than heterosexual young people, and this will probably also be visible in their paths towards forming their own families (Taavetti et al., 2015). The fifth research need would be to study family formation, take-up of leave patterns and perceptions and hopes of young people belonging to gender and sexual minorities.

The sixth gap is related to fertility. The general decline in fertility levels throughout the Western world (NOU 2017:6) is probably due to a connection between several factors. There is an extensive demographic research literature on fertility, but that there is a lack of studies that can shed light on how various conditions in the labor market such as career choices, pay, working hours, temporary positions and insecurity in the labor market affect fertility (NOU 2017:6). In addition, there are few studies of men's fertility behavior and what influences decisions about having children at the couple level.

To sum up, various perspectives on young adults in relation to parenthood have been touched in previous research in the Nordic countries while often this topic has not been the main focus of studies. Thus, there is a need for a comprehensive research focusing specifically on young adults' possibilities and experiences of becoming parents, reconciling work and family life, and sharing parental responsibilities in a gender equal manner.

Policy recommendations

Young parents are in a disadvantaged position in comparison with older parents, and they do not have the same freedom in deciding about the length of their parental leave. They receive less support from the parental support system, as their parental benefits are more often on a basic level, without income-related bonuses. However, these risks and financial problems do not necessarily define young parents' lived experiences of everyday life. They may still enjoy and value their parenthood as much as older parents. Young people are evaluated from the perspective of youth, and they must negotiate their life decisions in the midst of conflicting public worries, normative ideas of an ideal life-course in the Western society and other cultural norms. Thus, it is important to hear the voices of young people and young parents who are often seen as the marginal regarding family formation and family leave take-up.

The augmentation of mothers' part-time employment is sometimes discussed as a mean for improving mothers' labour market position or for solving problems regarding the reconciliation of work and family. However, this view's effectiveness does not get support from the literature. The key question for solving these issues as well as many other gender equality related issues is to increase fathers' care responsibilities and mothers' job opportunities (Salmi et al., 2016, 2017; Lainiala 2014; Rotkirch et al. 2017; Sutela 2013; Lindholm 2012; Eerola et al. 2019; Kuitto et al. 2019; Räsänen et al. 2019). Especially young fathers take parental leave very rarely. There should be enough social support available for young families so that they could make choices based on their needs and wishes and not only by external circumstances and expectations.

Young parents receive some support from public policies but the support systems seem quite scattered, and there is a risk to fall through the safety net of the Nordic welfare society. More knowledge is needed on young parents as a specific group in order to locate the shortcomings of policies.

Patterns of family formation are undergoing changes as more and more young people postpone family formation or choose not to have children at all (e.g, Miettinen 2015). Reasons behind voluntary childlessness are not entirely known, but one factor could be the current ecological sustainable crisis with climate change, overuse of natural resources and impoverishment of ecosystems. These issues need to be considered when discussing young peoples' life choices. If decreasing birth rate is seen as problem that needs to be solved, we must be able to create horizons with ecologically and socially sustainable future.

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