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Family and gender policies in Norway

Leira, Arnlaug

Abstract:

The NorSpaR project aims to analyse the main public policy initiatives by which Norway and Spain cope with the new social and economic challenges derived from the so-called New Social Risks (NSR). Although both countries present significant differences in their institutional settings (such as Spanish EU membership), or its belonging to diverse welfare regimes types (Norway is generally included in the Nordic regime, while Spain is part of the Mediterranean one), both countries share a common interest in addressing the aforementioned challenges while maintaining social cohesion. In the last decade, governments in both countries have tried to respond to those challenges by reforming their labour markets, adapting their unemployment schemes, as well as their gender, family and long-term care policies. The analysis covered in this project includes three areas of public policy addressing NSR. First, dependency is one of the most daunting challenges for post-industrial societies experiencing population ageing and with an increasing number of frail people in need of care. This situation is forcing governments to rethink their long-term care policies. Second, family and gender public programs need to respond to the growing difficulties of families in reconciling professional and family life. Third, in the transition to a post-industrial order, and in a context of mass unemployment, social protection systems have a renewed prominence. Along with the so-called passive policies offering financial support to the unemployed, active labour market policies are geared to put people back into work. In our analysis we try to find answers to the following questions: What are the challenges that each of these policies have been trying to address in recent years? How have these policies evolved? What kinds of reforms have been implemented, and which ones have been neglected? Have the policy goals and targets of welfare programs been modified in any significant way? Have the policy tools (services, transfers, funding or models of provision) changed? To what extent have these policies been successful in coping with social and economic problems? To what extent a social demand in favour of these changes exist? What are the main political and social actors intervening as stakeholders in these policies? Finally, what are the major similarities and differences existing between the two countries? To what extent are there policy proposals that might easily travel between them? Could they foster mutually enriching exchanges of information?

Keywords:

Welfare State; Public Sector Reform; Public Policies; Labour market; Long Term Care; Family Policies; Europe

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This paper is part of a Special GIGAPP Working Paper series aimed at disseminating the results of the NorSpaR Project (Coping with New Social Risk in Norway and Spain: Long-term policies, gender and family policies, and labour market and unemployment protection). This project has been financed by the EEA Grants through the Norwegian Embassy in Spain, and conducted by a group of Norwegian and Spanish researchers, including: Erling Barth, Inés Calzada, Svein Olav Daatland, Angie Gago, Arnlaug Leira, Pau Mari-Klose, Francisco Javier Moreno Fuentes, and Eloisa del Pino.

Introduction

The Scandinavian Welfare States are generally characterized by universalism, egalitarianism, income redistribution, a preference for social rights over needs-tested benefits, and comparative generosity in benefits and services. They have been used as empirical illustrations of the 'institutional model' in R. M. Titmuss's (1974) ideal-typology of Welfare States, and make up the social democratic Welfare State regime cluster in Gøsta Esping-Andersen's (1990) analysis entitled *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*.

In the 1960s and 1970s the Scandinavian Welfare States became transfer and service intensive (Esping-Andersen, 1999), and highly cost demanding. They also developed as 'caring states' through legislation of public responsibility for the funding and/or provision of social care services, especially for the very young and the frail elderly (Leira 1992; Sipilä 1997).

Summarizing the characteristics of the Nordic welfare model¹, a group of Nordic experts recently noted, among other things, that a high degree of universalism had secured access to basic social security and services for all citizens. Government involvement has been strong across welfare policy fields. Public financing of transfer incomes is considerable and the tax level is high. Local and regional authorities provide a wide range of services, including social and health services which are financed through taxes. For some services user fees are charged. Income disparities in wage/salary distribution and disposable income are comparatively constrained. The experts found that 'equal opportunities between women and men' is a basic principle in the Nordic Welfare States (NOSOSCO 2013, pp. 239–241). Increasingly, Scandinavia

¹ Generally, 'Scandinavia' refers to Denmark, Norway and Sweden, while the Nordic countries refer to these countries plus Finland, Iceland. For this paper, unless otherwise specified, the terms Scandinavian welfare model and Nordic welfare model are used interchangeably.

has expanded as a 'social rights state' (rettighetsstat, cf. Seip 1994). Popular support for the Welfare State is high, as are expectations for Welfare State protection, benefits and services.

The institutional arrangement between the Welfare State and families varies throughout Europe. Different forms of the Welfare State support different family forms and gender relations, and the ways in which family obligations are politically institutionalized have changed over time. A recent typology of family and intergenerational policies – based on the family policies of 27 European Welfare States – reports groups of states with similar policies, but not a clustering of states corresponding to the Welfare State typologies in common use, except for the Scandinavian countries and France, which, with respect to eldercare and childcare, are characterized by a high degree of defamilisation. These countries provide 'supported familialism' for young children (Saraceno and Keck 2010, p. 692).

In Norway, the 1970s saw the introduction of new Welfare State approaches to families with children and to gender issues; some of the challenges posed by profound economic restructuring, family change and new orientations to women's and men's position in society were addressed. By the end of the decade a new set of work/family/childcare/gender equality policies was established, and although reformed and extended during the following 30 years, the general structure was not fundamentally altered.

Two different, but interrelated processes were especially important in generating a rethinking of traditional family obligations; one illustrated in the expansion of the Welfare State, the other in the rise of the dual breadwinner family. In 1967, adoption of the Social Insurance Act set in place a comprehensive economic protection scheme, the National Social Insurance Scheme (NIS), often referred to as a main pillar of the Norwegian Welfare State. Among other things, the scheme (with later addenda) provided permanent pensions for all residents 70 years and above, for the severely disabled and for families following the loss of their economic provider. Furthermore, temporary benefits were provided in the case of sickness and unemployment, and for sole providers with young children. In legislation on social assistance (in 1964), the traditional filial obligation to support and care for elderly parents was abolished, redefined as social or welfare policies, and transformed into a responsibility of state and local authorities. Thereafter, planning of the gender and family policies of the modern Welfare State focused on two-generation families, that is, parent/s with young child/ren.

The second process, the 'modernization of motherhood' witnessed from the late 1960s in the rapid transition to employment of married mothers with young children, did not result from public policy planning, and was not immediately encouraged or facilitated by generous public childcare policies. To a very considerable extent, out-of-household care for young children depended on formal and informal agreements between women, mothers and child-minders. As the male breadwinner family gave way to the dual-earners, motherhood change preceded family policy reform (Leira, 1992). For an analysis of policy response to mothers' employment in Italy, Norway and Spain, see, e.g., Leira, Tobìo and Trifiletti (2004).

This paper discusses some of the central Norwegian gender and family policies adopted in the 1970s to the 2000s, but does not include the total range of public policies introduced in the field in the period. My focus is on work/family policies and their articulation with gender

equality considerations, especially in policies aimed at families with children under school age. Following this Introduction, the paper turns to a brief historical outline of some of the changes in Norwegian society important in setting the stage and framing the gender and family policies of the modern Norwegian Welfare State from the 1970s onwards. Next, I outline two waves of national gender and family policy reform, one starting in the 1970s, the other in the 1990s and continuing into the early 2000s. Special attention is paid to (i) *turning points* or ‘path breaks’ in legislation of family and gender policies, and (ii) the relationship of family change and policy reform. Thereafter the basic features of the gender and family policy field as per 2010 are briefly presented and discussed. In concluding, I point to some of the challenges facing the Nordic welfare model.

1. Changes in the social order

Discussing family law and women’s law in Norway, a prominent Norwegian sociologist of law once noted that more comprehensive legal change in the position of women in society was introduced in the period from the mid-19th century to the First World War than in the years 1920 to 1978. Yet, he observed that, ‘there may be good reasons to support the view that ... the real situation of women ... has undergone greater changes in the latter than in the former period’ (Aubert, 1990: 37). Before the turn of the 20th century, Norwegian women, married and unmarried, had attained legal majority and the right to engage in independent economic activity. They gained property rights both in marriage and in divorce that were comparatively strong in a European perspective. They gained access to higher education and the universities and gradually they were allowed into the professions. Legislation to protect children from neglect and abuse was passed in 1896. In 1894 Norway’s Industrial Security Act protected workers of both sexes from loss of income as a result of sickness and prohibited women from working in industry in the six weeks after delivery (paid maternity leave was granted from 1909). In 1913, women won the right to vote and stand for election on a par with men. Some years later, a cluster of laws known as the Children’s Laws gave the children of unmarried mothers the right to inherit and use the family name of the father.

Family and gender issues were hotly debated during the Nordic social reform period of the 1930s, which was the early period of the modern Welfare State. In Norway, however, policy reforms were halted during the Nazi occupation in 1940–1945.

The early post-WWII years have been described as the ‘golden age’ of Norwegian housewifery, with the male breadwinner family predominant. Some important family and gender legislation was passed, such as the Act on Child benefits of 1946, which was the first of Norway’s universally orientated social policies. In 1954 the country ratified the ILO Convention no. 100 on equal pay for work of equal value and established an Equal Wage Council. Separate taxation of married couples was legislated for in 1959 (for family and gender policy reforms of the period, see Gender Equality Council (1995)). By the late 1960s, the ‘golden age’ was abating, the numerical decline of the male breadwinner family had begun – only to accelerate in the following decades.

2. Gender and family policy reform of the 1970s – the formative years

The 1970s was the breakthrough period for the gender and family politics and policies of the modern Norwegian Welfare State. By the end of the decade new legislation on work/family/childcare/gender equality was established, and although later reformed and extended in the following thirty years, the general structure was not fundamentally altered.

Why, in the 1970s, were Welfare State policies to become the response to changes in traditional family arrangements in Norway and in the neighbouring countries, Denmark and Sweden? I cannot give a full answer, but note at least some of the processes of change in Norwegian society that spurred a rethinking of the arrangement between the state and families. These are:

- Economic restructuring, rapid mobilization of married mothers for labor market participation; diversification of family forms.
- Revival of the feminist movement and the political mobilization of women.
- The legacy of the Nordic Welfare State seen in the expansion of the egalitarian, redistributive, universally oriented Welfare State, motivating and legitimating expansion and redesign of the Scandinavian Welfare State as an ‘encompassing’ Welfare State (Kangas & Palme, 2005).

By the late 1960s, economic restructuring was under way and the service economy was emerging. An expanding tertiary sector was generating new jobs – often in public sector employment in positions traditionally considered as women’s work in health, education and social services. Increasingly, as married women, including the mothers of young children, entered paid work – a process facilitated by declining fertility rates and the improved education of girls – the male breadwinner family went into decline.

Moreover, in Norway, as in the neighboring countries, political radicalization processes of the 1960s and 1970s were ideologically important contributions in answer to the demand for and framing of policy reforms, with the feminist movement prominent in voicing demands for women’s rights to abortion on demand, and equal participation in the labor market, politics and society at large. In the early 1970s, the government started the planning of a new family and gender equality policy. ‘State feminism’ (to use the terminology of Helga Hernes (1987)), the interchange of feminist grassroots movements and government politics, was on the way. The 1970s period was to see a remarkable redrawing of the boundaries between the public and private spheres, and especially between the state and families. The care arrangements for young children were to receive unprecedented involvement of the state and municipalities. Increasingly, policies accommodating the combination of work and family were articulated within policy discourse on advancing gender equality not only at work but at home, too, and throughout society. Considerations of how to promote gender equality in parental responsibilities added to the politicizing of early childhood care (Leira, 2006).

In two respects, in particular, the legislation of work/family childcare policies of the 1970s represented novel orientations to the regulation of traditional family and gender arrangements. Of special importance was: (i) the adoption in 1975 of an *Act governing day-care services for children* introduced by a Social Democratic government. This was a *turning point* in legislation of state and municipal responsibility for childcare provision. With the long-term aim of making publicly funded childcare services universally available, the Act signaled a shift away from residual, selectively oriented policies of the day. Municipalities, of which there were more than 430 at the time, were charged with planning for provision, the costs to be borne by the state, local government and parental fees.

(ii) In addition to the maternity rights long in existence, *legislation of parental leave* (introduced in 1977) by the Social Democratic government provided entitlements of working fathers to giving priority to childcare over the demands of the job. This innovative approach of the Welfare State to fathers as both economic provider and carer was a *turning point* – another break with traditional family policies. The total paid leave period (with job security retained) was extended to 18 weeks; 6 of these weeks was mothers' leave, with the remaining period taken at the discretion of both parents. Fathers' individual entitlement was for two weeks of unpaid leave at the birth of his child. (Wage compensation became the subject of local negotiations).

In sum, the childcare policies combining services and leaves projected political facilitation of a new family form – an early, but modest, version of the dual-earner/dual-carer family.

Furthermore, important legislation of the 1970s foregrounding gender issues included *legislation of abortion on demand* within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, in 1978, a strengthening of women's civil rights to 'property in their persons'.

Legislation on gender equality (in force from 1979) helped to equate the participation and opportunities of men and women across societal institutions. Norway's Gender Equality Act was to apply not just to the labor market but throughout society. Discrimination on the grounds of gender was prohibited. Some leeway in treatment was allowed, however, to improve the status of women in society. The active promotion of gender equality was increasingly to be integrated in public policy reforms, and was made the responsibility of public authorities (Vollset, 2011:60–63). A Gender Equality Ombudsman was established, and an Appeals Board. The former Equal Wage Council had earlier been replaced by a Gender Equality Council.

Gender equality initiatives flourished in the following years. In 1981, an addendum to the Equal Status Act required representation of both sexes on all government appointed committees and boards, and an equal status action plan was adopted.

Gender and family policies of the 1970s challenged the traditional gender order of society. It is no wonder that the legislation mentioned did not meet with universal applause. During the following decades, it was increasingly agreed across political parties that some support had to be provided for families with young children. However, in public and partisan political debate, disagreement remained, with some parties supporting cash grants for childcare as an

alternative to making use of services. Increasingly, conflict arose about the balancing of gender equality and parental choice in work/family/childcare policies.

3. Family and gender policies 1990s to the early 2000s – gender equality versus parental choice

Family diversification increased during the 1990s, with cohabitation becoming more common, a rise in children born to non-married parents, and an increase in parental split-up and divorce, even among parents of young children. A rising number of parents, the majority of them women, experienced periods as lone providers. Furthermore, during the latter decades of the century, as immigration had been steadily increasing, the population was becoming more ethnically and culturally diverse and encompassing a more complex set of family arrangements.

Throughout the economic crises of the 1990s and into the 2000s, policy support for work/family/childcare policies was maintained in Norway. Public expenses for early childhood education and care increased, innovative approaches to work/family policies were introduced, and the repertoire of public policies was expanded.

In the long-term plan for the early 1990s the Social Democratic government launched an ambitious scheme for the promotion of closer co-ordination of parental leave and childcare services (St.meld. 4, 1988–89). Paid parental leave was to be expanded to cover the first year of life, with publicly subsidized childcare services made available for children aged 1 to the age of school entry. In short, *continuous* public childcare policies were to reach from the cradle to the start of elementary school. – Some years later, a government-appointed committee advocated a new deal for family policies, a social investment perspective: a child-oriented society providing generous public policies in which services and cash transfers were combined was presented as a win-win situation for children, parents and for society in need of qualified labor (NOU 1996: 13).

Paid parental leave – the daddy ‘quota’

While the 1975 Act governing daycare for children was widely regarded as support for mothers’ paid work outside the home, in the early 1990s Social Democratic considerations of gender equality in work/family policies turned increasingly towards the practices of fathers in the belief that if gender equality efforts stopped at the family front door, the struggle for gender equality in other fields might fail (Leira, 1998; Ellingsæter, 2003).

In 1993, the Social Democrats introduced an important addition to the existing parental leave regulation – another *turning point* in legislation of gender and family policies. The total leave period was to be extended and supplemented with a ‘daddy leave’, an individual entitlement of fathers to four weeks of paid leave to care for his young child. The daddy leave was transferable to the mother only in very special circumstances, and was in this sense a ‘no choice’ reform. For various reasons, the proposal met with opposition, but was adopted nonetheless. Among fathers, the daddy leave rapidly gained in popularity and at least some of the period was taken up by the majority of those entitled to it. The leave period available for use according to parental choice was generally taken up by the mothers (see, e.g., Leira, 2006;

Vollset, 2011). Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s the daddy leave was repeatedly extended, and the proportion of days taken by fathers steadily increased (see Table 1).

Table 1. Fathers' take-up of total leave days with benefit in the event of pregnancy, childbirth or adoption (percent).

	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
1990	4.1	2.4	..	8.8
1995	4.4	3.6	5.8	10.3
2000	5.1	4.4	7.2	13.7
2012	7.4	8.7	19.8	25.1

Sources: 1990–2000: Nordic Statistical Yearbook, 46, (2008).

Table 4.3, p. 60); 2012: Nordic Statistical Yearbook (2013: 64).

Cash grants for childcare

In 1998, a coalition government comprising the Christian Democrats, the Centre and Liberal parties legislated for cash grant as an alternative to publicly funded childcare services for children aged 13 to 36 months. (The cash grant alternative had been debated for years, and was a central issue especially for the Christian Democrats heading the government.) As stated in the first paragraph, the aim of the Cash Grant Act (Lov om kontantstøtte) '... was to give parents more time to care for their own child, to strengthen real parental choice with respect to form of childcare, and to provide more equality in the state transfers to parents for childcare, irrespective of type of childcare arrangement' (my translation). This reform triggered heated public and partisan political debate. Although cash grants were nothing new in Norwegian family policies, the institution of cash grants for the non-use of public services certainly represented a new principle. Advocated as supporting parental choice with respect to childcare, cash grants were commonly interpreted as challenging gender equality and support for mothers staying at home to care for their young children (Leira, 1998; Ellingsæter, 2003).

In 1999, claims for the cash grant were made for 75 percent of the 1 to 2-year-olds, and for some years take-up of the grant remained high. However, since publicly funded childcare services were in short supply in several municipalities, many parents did not have a real choice with respect to form of care. Hence, the grant was widely regarded as compensation for the lack of access to publicly funded services. When these later increased, take-up of the cash grant declined. – If the grant had matched parental preferences, the development of childcare policies might have taken a different turn. As controversies and political conflict unfolded around no-choice and pro-choice reforms, once again gender issues were at the core; increasingly, support of gender equality was confronting advocacy of parental choice.

Childcare services

Making publicly funded childcare services universally available proved a long-term project. In accordance with the Act governing day-care for children, local authorities (municipalities) became responsible for planning local provision, but were under no obligation to meet local demand. Across local authorities, provision varied. State subsidies were not sufficient to win over local reluctance to policy change. For decades, demand outstripped supply. In the early

2000s, however, the parliamentary opposition (including parties to the right and left with the support of the Social Democrats) agreed to increase state funding, institute maximum fees for users, and increase public subsidies for private providers, a compromise to which the centre/conservative minority coalition government reluctantly agreed the following year (*Dagsavisen* 2014, p. 6).

The childcare agreement was upheld after the 2005 elections when a government majority coalition was formed by the Social Democrats, the Socialist left and Centre parties (the red-greens), and provision of services increased. – Private provision of childcare services was nothing new in Norwegian politics; from the 1970s into the 2000s private provision, publicly subsidized, has been an important element in the total provision of childcare services. As public subsidies increased, so also did private provision, with publicly subsidized, for-profit provision increasingly adding to the public and non-profit services. For parents, the introduction of a maximum level of parental fees made services more affordable. The prolongation of parental leave to one year and the earlier reduction of the age of school-entry from 7 to 6 years had reduced the number of children for which services were in demand.

In 2008, legislation of a childcare ‘guarantee’ stated the right of a child aged 1–5 years to have access to publicly subsidized childcare services if the parents so desired. Finally, in 2010, for children aged 1–5 years of age, supply was largely meeting demand and in this sense universally available. – From the 1970s to the early 2000s work/family/childcare policies had come a long way.

During the latter decades of the 19th century, gender equality initiatives were working their way, so to speak, across institutions. From the late 1970s, the participation of women increased throughout society, in political and public life, in higher education, the labor market and top politics, as did, but to a lesser extent, the participation of men in childcare and domestic work. By the early 1980s, Gro Harlem Brundtland headed the first of ‘the women’s Cabinets’. Women were in the majority among students entering universities, and made up half of all students graduating with a higher degree. By the early 1990s women were in the majority among students entering universities, and comprised half of all students graduating with a higher degree.

Public and political debates on gender equality in work/family arrangements continued in the 2000s, increasingly contested by arguments in favour of parental choice. Discussion of the persistent gender wage difference was kept up, as were demands for equal pay for work of equal value. Demand for an end to involuntary part-time work was repeatedly voiced. The ‘glass ceiling’ – the barrier to women’s advancement – was heatedly debated, as was the gendered division of childcare and domestic work. Government-appointed committees were set up to report on the persisting gender wage gap (see NOU 2008: 6), and to overview the general status of gender equality in Norwegian society and make proposals for change (NOU 2011: 18; NOU 2012: 15). (In 2014, women formed the great majority of students graduating from the faculties of medicine, veterinary medicine and law, which prompted questions about male students being given preferential treatment.)

4. Major features of the gender and family policy area ca. 2010

During the latter half of the 20th century, as the traditional arrangements between the Welfare State, labor market and family were changing, the institutional order of society was profoundly transformed. The family became less important as an economic and care provider institution for the elderly and disabled, and the Welfare State and local authorities more important. Gender relationships in families were also altered. With employment rates high and with entitlements to social benefits and services largely individualized, family and marriage became less important as economic provider institutions for adult women, while the labor market and the Welfare State became more important. Increasingly, a larger share of the costs of children and childcare was borne by the Welfare State and municipalities. The institutional valuation of early childhood shifted, as witnessed in the gradual establishment of childcare-related social rights.

The expanding Welfare State, families and children

The National Social Insurance Scheme demonstrates the importance of the Welfare State in family economy. It is compulsory for all legal residents to be insured under the Scheme. At any time, close to one in three of the adult population received their main income from the Scheme (Bay et al., 2010).

In Norway, in 2010, total social expenditure for families with children was 3,31 percent of GDP; of which 42 percent was for cash benefits, 58 percent for services (NOSOSKO 2013, ch. 9).

Parents still have the principal economic responsibility for children, and for arranging their care and education, with the Welfare State contributing to the cost of bringing up and caring for children via paid leaves, cash transfers, subsidized childcare and publicly provided educational services (see Appendix for details).

Paid leaves and cash grants

At the time of the birth of a child, the majority of working parents are entitled to paid parental leave with job security ensured. Furthermore, working parents are entitled to paid leave of absence to care for a sick child, 0–12 years old.

Mothers who do not fulfill the requirements for paid leave are entitled to a cash grant. A universal child benefit is paid for children aged 0–17 years of age. In 2010, about one in three of the parents of children aged 12–36 months claimed a cash grant for parental or other form of private care from the state (an alternative to making use of publicly funded childcare services).

Care and educational services

The majority of the children under school age were attending publicly subsidized childcare services (see Table 2).

Table 2. Children in publicly funded day care 2012. Percent of age group.

	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
0 years	18.5	0.8	4.3	0.0
1 year	87.6	28.8	70.6	51.2
2 years	93.1	52.1	89.0	91.8
3 years	95.8	68.1	96.7	96.4
4 years	98.5	76.2	97.3	97.7
5 years	96.8	78.7	98.9	98.0

Source: Nordic Council of Ministers: The Nordic Countries in figures 2012: 15.

From age 6–16 years children attend publicly funded obligatory education.

For the younger school-children, aged 6–10 years, the municipalities provide out-of school services.

Parental fees are charged.

Families and labor markets

In 2012, of all households in which there were parents with children aged 0–17 years, 54 percent of the parents were married, 25 percent cohabiting and 21.5 percent single-parent families. Like the other Nordic countries, Norway had a relatively high number of one-parent households, 80 percent of these headed by mothers; 45 percent had one child, 35 percent 2 children and 16 percent three or more children. The average number of children per household was 1.7 (NOSOSCO 2013, Table 3.2: p. 31).

Employment rates illustrate the importance of the labor market for family economy. In 2009, 74.4 percent of Norwegian women were in paid employment compared to the OECD (2009) average of 59.6 percent, and the participation of women was approaching that of men. Unemployment rates among women and men were well below 4 percent.

High labor market participation rates of women go together with comparatively high fertility rates. At 1.98 children per woman, the 2009 rate was above the OECD average of 1.74 (OECD, 2011). The great majority of parents have an income from the labor market, with temporary loss of income in the case of sickness, unemployment, and lone parenthood being compensated via the National Social Insurance Scheme.

In 2010, the large majority (83 percent) of mothers of children aged 0–2 years were registered in the labor force, as were the mothers of 89 percent of the 3–5 year olds. Almost half of all employed partnered or married mothers were part-timers. Part-time work is not common among fathers. In recent years the gender gap in domestic work has been shrinking; the number of hours mothers work has reduced, while the contribution of fathers has increased (Kitterød & Rønsen, 2012).

High labor market participation rates of women go together with comparatively high fertility rates. At 1.98 children per woman, the 2009 rate was above the OECD average of 1.74 (OECD, 2011). There were notable differences between women and men (and between mothers and fathers) in hours of work, income, wages and career advancement (Birkelund and Petersen, 2010). Norwegian mothers and fathers make their decisions concerning how to arrange for economic provision and childcare from within a labor market strongly segregated by sex, and with a fairly persistent gender wage gap. This gap has been slowly shrinking, i.e. from 15 percent in the early 2000s to 12–13 percent in 2011. For women and men working within the

same sector and holding similar jobs, the gender wage gap was 7.1 percent explained by (i) the highly segregated labor market, with women filling the great majority of jobs in public sector employment and men in private employment and (ii) the unequal sharing of childcare/domestic work, following from women taking longer parental leave and taking up part-time work (Barth et al., 2013; see also Equal Wage Commission (NOU 2008:6)). On average, mothers' income declined when they had more children, while that of fathers rose (Hardoy & Schøne, 2008).

Child poverty

In 2009, 5.5 percent of children were living in poverty, which was the third lowest child poverty rate in the OECD, well below the average of 12.7 percent. However, in recent years child and family poverty has been increasing, especially among families with one economic provider and in some immigrant groups.

5. Parental reception of childcare policy reforms

Parental reception of childcare policy reforms indicates that norms for good parenting and upbringing have changed. Parental leave entitlements had repeatedly been extended, and by 2012 were now a total of 49 weeks at 100 percent wage compensation or, alternatively, 59 weeks at 80 percent. The individual entitlement of each parent was 14 weeks, with the remainder of the period for use according to parental choice. Entitlements to paid parental leave and publicly funded childcare were used widely. For the first year of life the great majority of children were in parental care, mainly by mothers, with 20 percent of the days taken up by fathers (see Table 1). The supply of publicly funded quality childcare services was largely meeting demand, with 9 out of 10 children aged 1–5 attending; 80 percent of the children, aged 1–2 years and 97 percent of the older children (Table 2).

As provision of publicly subsidized childcare services has increased, take-up of the cash grant has declined; from 75 percent of the children aged 1–2 years in 1999 to 32 percent in 2010 (NSD, 2011). The cash grant is taken up mainly by families with one breadwinner. Among some immigrant families, take-up has remained high, raising questions about the grant having the unintended effect of reducing opportunities for the social integration of mothers and children.

Gender and work/family policies – gender equality vs parental choice

From the 1970s into the 2000s, the policy package of paid parental leave and affordable, quality childcare services has contributed to an equalizing of both the time spent by parents in caring for their young ones and of parents' access to employment and employment-related social and economic rights. The most notable difference is evidenced in the rise in mothers' labor market participation and their contribution to family income. The contribution of fathers to children's care and to domestic work has increased, but more modestly. However, as noted, mothers generally take longer leave at the birth of their child than fathers do, and more often return to shorter weekly hours, which is what fathers generally do not do. The work/family combinations of mothers, plus the effects of a highly gender segregated labor market and persistent gender wage gap, means greater economic opportunity costs, as reflected in lower social and pension rights and greater risk of poverty in old age for mothers. Divorce and parental split-up mean that a large proportion of mothers are likely to experience periods as

sole providers; hence, for mothers, parental choice resulting in leaving the labor market for longer periods of time and a reduction in working hours may be a risky long-term economic strategy.

How the parental response to gender-neutral parental choice reforms should be interpreted has been much debated. This is understood, for example, as an expression of power relations (Ahrne & Roman, 1997) or as resulting from rational economic choice, e.g. in the tradition of Becker (1973), alternatively, as resulting from parental preference (e.g., Hakim, 1996) or 'gendered moral rationalities' (Duncan & Edwards, 1999).

With the exception of entitlements to maternity leave following the birth of a child, the work/family policies discussed represent opportunities, not obligations. The notion of parental choice with respect to time-use is clearly an enticing prospect. However, in discussing parental choice in the take-up of work/family policies, the conditions under which 'preference' is exercised and parental 'choices' are made are still in need of consideration, as is gendering of the long-term consequences of the choices made. Preference theory often neglects the limits to choice, as argued by, for example, Crompton (2002). Moreover, gender differences in economic opportunity costs do not result from individual choice or preference only. The potential of young women to become mothers may negatively influence their job opportunities and career tracks. Furthermore, the focus on parental choice may readily obscure the interplay of parental decisions and labor market structures and processes. Gendered reception of work/family policies is played out in the context of labor market segregation, gender wage gaps, local labor market job requirements, the framework of wage negotiations, the formulation of Welfare State benefit systems, etc. In short, gender equality in the labor market is about more than work/family/childcare policies, and work/family policies alone are not sufficient to overcome the gender inequalities generated in labor market structures and processes.

Since the 1990s, differences in approach to work/family/childcare/gender equality policies have become more pronounced in partisan politics, played out as a contest between different family and gender models, with consideration of gender equality confronting advocacy of parental choice. Generally, the Social Democrats and Socialist Left party have expanded childcare services and paid leave entitlements for fathers, advanced as support of gender equality and the dual-earner/dual-carer family. In support of parental choice, the Conservative Party and conservative Progress Party have favored cash grants for childcare, often interpreted as support of mothers at home. In 2011, the Conservatives included abolition of the daddy leave in their party platform, which was in line with the wishes of the Progress Party.

The financial crisis of the 2000s has not hit Norway particularly hard. Among women and men, mothers as well as fathers, labor market participation is high and unemployment low. Work/family/childcare policies have not been the subject of dramatic cuts or reform; on the contrary, reforms have added to the repertoire of policy options available for families with young children. However, partisan political controversy concerning family and childcare policies has become more pronounced, and has kept alive public interest in work/family policies. In a national political landscape often pictured as largely consensual, this has made

the policy field symbolically important as a marker of ideological differences in partisan politics.

Partisan political conflict lines in work/family/childcare policies were clearly demonstrated when in 2012 a red–green government coalition decided to cut the cash grant for children aged 25–36 months. When a minority coalition of the Conservative and Progress parties (the blue/blues) came to power in the autumn of 2013, the new Minister from the Progress Party dealing with gender equality and family policies signaled a new direction for family policies. A government report to the national assembly, forwarded by the former red–green government presenting reforms of gender equality policy, was promptly withdrawn and a new report announced. The early proposals for policy change included reinstatement of the cash grant period for children aged 13–36 months and transfer of four weeks of the daddy leave to the period of parental choice. In addition, government proposals for change in the abortion legislation proved highly controversial and brought about heated public debate. The rationale of the cash grant cut and the proposals mentioned above was not in economic constraints, but rather in partisan political disagreement concerning which family forms to support and the appropriate policy means.

6. Summary

Since the 1970s, the Welfare State approach to families with young children has changed profoundly. Gender and family policies have contributed importantly to equalization of the opportunities of women and men combining work and parental responsibilities. More generally, gender equality policies have contributed to an equalization of the opportunities for women and men to participate across societal institutions. The traditional public/private divide has been redrawn as the Welfare State has taken on greater responsibility for the content and cost of the early childhood years, once considered the responsibility of the family and parents. The shift should be interpreted in relation to family and demographic change, labor market restructuring and redesign of the Welfare State. Together, these processes have profoundly altered the contexts and contents of childhood, motherhood and fatherhood.

In a 30 years retrospect parents do share working time and caring time more equally. Most striking are the changes in the economic activity of mothers. Fathers spend more time in childcare and domestic work than did the grandparent generation. Welfare state policies addressing the work/family/childcare equation have contributed greatly to the childcare-related rights of children and parents. Parental responsibilities are not eradicated, but have attained new dimensions. Among families with young children the male breadwinner does no longer set the standard for family practices, but has given way to great variety of arrangements. In dual- parent families the majority of mothers and fathers contribute to both economic support and care, with some families sharing more equally at one end, and families practicing a traditional gender division at the at the other end.

7. Challenges to the Nordic Model

In the early 2000s, as social analysts discussed the restructuring, retrenchment and resilience of the Welfare State, several commentators noted that the high-cost Nordic Welfare States

had proved quite robust in previous periods of economic crisis. In combination, encompassing national welfare systems, high levels of employment and small, open, export-oriented economies had weathered economic downturns well. During the recent financial crisis Nordic social analysts have argued that (with some exceptions) so far, the Nordic model had done relatively well (e.g., Moene, 2011).


In recent discussions of reform of the Nordic welfare model, two different but interrelated sets of challenges come up repeatedly, one focusing on the economic viability or sustainability of the model, the other on the possible erosion of the traditionally high support of the welfare. – In the following, I briefly add some comments on the two from a work/family/childcare policy perspective.

In the early 2000s, the Nordic countries are confronting needs for costly reform, innovation, and rearrangement between the welfare providing institutions of society. According to Nordic social policy experts, the greying of the population, especially the rise in those 80+, is the largest social policy challenge of the Nordic model in the coming years, and affects several policy fields, such as pensions, health care, nursing and social services (NOSOSCO 54:2013). Moreover, most likely, demographic ageing will affect the arrangements between the Welfare State and families, and impact on the work/family/gender equality policies of the Nordics.

In combination, demographic ageing, decline in the population of working age and fertility rates below reproduction rate, represent a pressing challenge for the economic viability of a largely tax-based Welfare State. Therein lies the ‘Achilles heel’ of the Nordic model, argues Gøsta Esping-Andersen (2002). If public health and social care services for frail adults and elderly persons are to be kept up at the standards of to-day, costs are bound to rise, as is the demand for care labor. Increasing competition for scarce resources emphasizes the need for prioritizing of public spending, and raises concerns as to what extent the Welfare State should shoulder old and new social risks. In Norway, state and local government resources are not estimated to be sufficient to meet future demand. A recent report to the government signaled that families and the voluntary sector should be invited to share more of care responsibilities (NOU 2011:7). The costs of population ageing may in turn raise questions concerning intergenerational solidarity, not to mention the gendered division of care labor, what might weaken the high population support of the welfare model.

In Norway, anticipation of Welfare State performance is still high. According to ESS-data close to 9 out of 10 Norwegians believed that ten years ahead the Welfare State could still afford to keep up or even improve the standard of public health services, 8 out of 10 assumed that the level of old age pension would be kept up or increase (NSD-nytt 2010). –However, the encompassing Welfare State might come to fall victim to its own success. With need for cost containment and sharper prioritizing of Welfare State expenditure, the Welfare State might not be able to deliver as anticipated. Hence, promises might turn into pitfalls, and political support for the redistributive, egalitarian, welfare model might wear thin.

From a different perspective, considering the increasing complexity and instability of family arrangements and the increasing heterogeneity in cultural and ethnic family traditions, a general willingness in the population to support the central elements of the model should not

be taken for granted. Altogether, the new complexity in family forms adds to the challenges for universally oriented, egalitarian, generous welfare policies –and to questions concerning economic sustainability and popular support of the normative basis of the welfare model. 

Abbreviations

NOSOSCO (Nordisk sosialstatistisk komite) (Nordic Social Statistical Committee)

NOU Norges offentlige utredninger (Norway's official reports.

NSD Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste (Norwegian Social Science Data Services)

St. meld. (Stortingsmelding) (report prepared by one of the government ministries for the national assembly)

Appendix

The organisation of welfare policies

The three-tiered organization of welfare policies in Norway is based on the state, counties and municipalities. Social income transfers of the National Social Insurance Scheme (NIS), and some other benefits are administered by the Norwegian Work and Welfare Administration (NAV). The main aim of the (NIS) is to provide economic security and compensate for special costs in the case of unemployment, pregnancy and delivery, lone parenthood, sickness and injury, old age and loss of provider. Most income protection schemes combine a basic insurance and an income dependent benefit for those who have been gainfully employed. - The NIS is financed via contributions from employees, self-employed, employers and the state.

Social assistance is the responsibility of the municipalities, and they are responsible on a daily basis for services such as childcare, child and youth welfare, health care and nursing and care for the elderly and disabled (NOSOSCO 2013).

Benefits for children and families with children: cash grants, parental leave and services

Included in the NIS are the following cash transfers aimed at children and families with young children:

- paid parental leaves, adoption benefits and a cash grants for mothers;
- pension to surviving children (child pension) and to surviving spouse/cohabiter/partner;
- transitory benefit to unmarried, divorced or separated women and men who are sole providers for young children

(For more information see e.g., Grødem 2010; Mærland, J. and Hatland, A.).

In addition, the universal Child Benefit, the Forwarded Benefit for Child Maintenance, and the Cash Grant for childcare, all fully tax-based, are regulated via special legislation.

Paid parental leave, adoption benefits, cash grant for mothers

In 2013 the total paid leave period for parents were 49 weeks at full wage compensation or 59 weeks at 80 percent. Fourteen weeks were reserved for the mother, and fourteen weeks were reserved for the father, the remaining weeks were for use according to parental choice. In the case of adoption the paid leave period is reduced to 46 and 56 weeks respectively.

Flexible use of the paid leave is possible within a period of three years.

Entitlement to the paid leave period is made conditional upon the mother having been in paid employment six out of the last 10 months before the delivery, at a specified income level. For sole parents and for multiple births special rules apply.

Mothers who do not qualify for paid leave are entitled to a lump sum (a non-recurrent cash grant). (For more information see Mærland, J. and Hatland, A.).

In addition each of the parents is entitled to leave of absence from work with full wage compensation to care for a sick child (aged 0 – 12 years old) for ten days per year. For parents with two or more children and for lone provider, special rules apply.

Survivors' pensions (child pension)

At the death of one or both parents children aged 0-18/20 years old are entitled to a special child pension

Surviving spouse/cohabiter/partner may qualify for a survivor's pension or a transitory benefit (overgangsstønad) if the relationship had lasted for five years or more, or the couple were co-parents of child/ren. Surviving spouse who does not qualify for the pension may receive a transitory benefit. (For details, see Mærland and Hatland; Grødem 2010).

Support for sole providers

Women and men who are sole providers (unmarried, separated or divorced) for children aged under eight years are entitled to economic support if they are unable to provide for, due to caring responsibilities for the child. A transitory benefit is granted for a maximum of three years for providers who are employed, actively seeking for employment or in education. (For more information, see Mærland and Hatland; Grødem, 2010).

Child benefit

The child benefit in 2013 is a universal benefit, paid for children aged 0-17 years old. The sum paid per month is equal for all children, and made payable to one of the parents, most often the mother. A higher rate is paid for children living in the two northernmost counties. Lone parents receive an additional sum. (corresponding to the benefit paid for one child more than the actual number of the children of the parent in question).

Child maintenance

For children aged 0 to 18 who live with one of the parents, but do not qualify for the child pension mentioned above, that is, *children of unmarried, divorced or separated parents*, the NIS may forward child maintenance. (For more information, see Grødem, 2010).

Cash grant for childcare,

In 2010, the cash grant for childcare was paid for children aged 12-36 months old, as an alternative to making use of publicly funded childcare services. Part-time attendance might be combined with reduced cash grant benefit.

Publicly funded services (care and education)

Local authorities are responsible on a daily basis for *childcare services*, for children aged 1-5 years old. Services are financed by block grants from the state, local authorities, and user's fees (within a maximum level). Services are provided by local authorities (municipalities), private non-profit and private for-profit providers.

After-school services for children aged 6-10 years are provided by municipalities, and are financed by municipalities and parental fees.

Obligatory education (for children aged 6-16) is financed by the municipalities and counties.

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