

**United Nations Commission on the Status of Women**  
**Fifty-seventh session**  
**4 - 15 March 2013**  
**New York**

**INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL**

**Review Theme: Equal sharing of responsibilities between  
women and men, including caregiving in the context of  
HIV/AIDS**

**Panel 4: Gender norms and stereotypes, socialization and  
unequal power relations**  
**Sharing and balancing life-work responsibilities**

**Parental leave policy in Sweden: evolution, lessons learned**

by

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.



new policies in place. During this period the fundamental principles of gender equality was outlined focusing on economic independence for women and men individually.

Three specific reforms laid the ground for these political aims: the individual taxation law of 1971 meant that spouses were taxed individually, not jointly, which made it more advantageous for both to work; the 1974 parliamentary decision to expand universal child care provision, with high pedagogical quality; and the parental insurance scheme of 1974, that replaced an earlier maternity allowance with a parental allowance, underscoring men's shared responsibility for care work and also both women's and men's right to be able to combine work with caring for children (Fürst 1999).

Among the important aspects of this policy development was the transition from talking about "women's issues" to addressing "gender equality". This meant outspokenly pointing to that these policies should concern men as much as women and that gender equality perspectives had to be included in all branches of politics. Fundamental was the understanding that it would be impossible to achieve equality in the labor market without changing the traditional role of men and transforming gender relations in the family. Gender equality was viewed as an important step towards realiz

economy and demographical changes. New political solutions have included increased privatization of services, reductions in many social benefit levels and lowered taxes. Still Sweden is among the most equal countries worldwide but this development has to be monitored closely, especially its effects on gender equality (Social Insurance Report 2012:4:75).

In the context of the current economic crises, it is worth noting that the Swedish welfare system has proven highly resilient to economic downswings. The financial crises that hit Sweden i

months is that in 2002 a month was added to the leave length, meaning that an increase in one parent's leave did not necessarily mean a decrease in the other parent's leave.

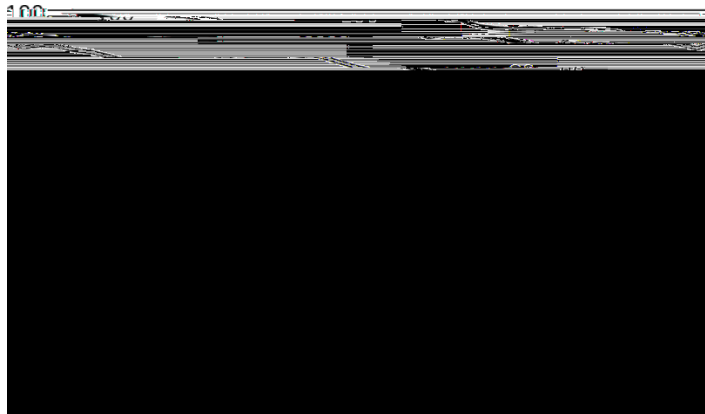
Since 2006 Sweden has, once more, a liberal right government. The current government introduced a gender equality bonus 2008 with the message to parents that the more the leave is shared, the more bonus they will receive. The Bonus system was adjusted and simplified in 2012. From being a tax credit that parents' needed to apply for and that was paid to parents' tax account the year after the parental leave was used, it is now given directly to the parents together with the parental leave benefit, without the need to apply. For every day that the parents share the leave equally, a bonus of 100 SEK (approximately 10 euros) will be received. It does not apply to the reserved months or the flat-rate days, and thus can be paid for a maximum of 4.5 months. The government also reintroduced a flat-rate family care allowance (earlier in short use 1994). This reform works counter to gender equality goals, as it encourages parents/women to not enter the labor market, but is not used to large extent.

Parental leave is used by practically all mothers and by around 9 out of 10 fathers. For many parents, state-legislated benefits are complemented by extra benefits from the employer on the basis of collective agreements. The considerable flexibility of parental leave use is often exploited by parents; for example, by saving parts of leave to extend summer vacations or reduce working hours during the child's preschool years. The leave may be extended, by accepting a lower replacement level, a strategy used especially by mothers (Duvander & Johansson 2012).

and 2002, so far, no effect resulting from the gender equality bonus introduced in 2008. The



**Figure 1.** Women's and men's share of used parental leave benefit days, 1974–2010.



Source: Swedish Social Insurance Agency.

List of references:

Angelov, Nikolay; Johansson, Per and Lindahl, Erica (2013) Is the persistent gender gap in income and wages due to unequal family responsibilities? The Institute for Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policy (IFAU)