

11th International seminar of the Leave Policies and Research Network

18-19 September 2014, Tallinn
Summary of the seminar

On 18-19 September 11th annual seminar of the International Leave Policies and Research Network took place in Tallinn, Estonia. Each year, the Leave Network has been bringing together experts from different parts of the world to exchange knowledge and information, and to develop cooperation research projects. Leave policies are a set of policies very crucial for enhancing gender equality in the societies, in improving family and work reconciliation, for child welfare and also fertility.



For the first time, the seminar was held in the Baltic States and the focus was on the Baltic and Nordic region. Since the Nordic countries are the forerunners in this field, the Nordic experience has always been very important part of the Network seminars and other activities. However, in 2014, the seminar, for the first time, turned the attention to the wider Nordic-Baltic region in order to discuss, analyse and exchange experiences and best practices between these countries. Comparing and analysing these two regions is very helpful for both – Baltic States have been learning from the Nordic countries, but as studies show, the learning has been only partial and different policies have developed as a result. All participants benefit from better understanding how the policy learning works - what are the good practices and how the learning from the examples of other countries works. Also, the Nordic policies and experiences were presented and discussed from critical point of view with the help of the seminar participants who come from Baltic Sea region, but also from elsewhere in Europe and world. In order to develop well-working leave policies it is significant to compare and analyse different experiences of leave policies across the countries and over the time, to understand the processes of policy-learning and also understand the gender inequality and the factors behind it.

Following paper will give an overview summary of the presentations and discussions of the seminar. [PROGRAMME](#) and [PRESENTATIONS](#) of the seminar are available at the Leave Networks webpage.

The seminar was organized by the Praxis Centre for Policy Studies and financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers and Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs.

Leave policies in the Baltics and Nordic countries

The Leave Network had also welcoming words from **Merle Kuusk**, representing the Nordic Council of Ministers (see the [presentation](#)). This was followed by host country presentations with a special focus on Estonia and other Baltic States. **Katre Pall** from the Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs provided an introduction to historical overview of Estonian leave policies starting already from the Soviet times. Much of which gives also a good idea also on the other Soviet countries, before in 1990s the policies started to develop into different directions (see the [presentation](#)).

Professor **Ruta Braziene** (Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania) and dr. **Marre Karu** (Praxis Centre for Policy Studies, Estonia) showed that despite to the identical history of leave and other policies, starting from the 1990s the leave policies have developed somewhat differently. However, the main challenges have been the same in all three small countries – the decrease of population due to low fertility and migration. Creating generous leave policies has been one of the ways to tackle these problems. Table below summarises the main characteristics of the current parental leave in three countries which shows that there are remarkable similarities in the overall scheme, but also significant differences, for instance in eligibility rules. Also, the economic crisis influenced the leave rights in three countries to a different extent. See more from the [presentation](#).

	Duration	Payment	Ceiling	Floor	Eligibility	Working parents
ESTONIA	Until child is 3 years old	100% until 1.5years + 38€ per month after	€2378 per month (3x average wage year before last)	€355 or €320 if there is no employment history	All parents	Benefit educed according to a formula if earnings above 320 Eur
LATVIA	1.5 years, to be used until child is 8	60% for 1 year + 43€ per month after or 43,75% for 1.5 years	Benefit exceeding 925€ per month is reduced by 50%	142€ per month	All employees + self-employed	30% of the benefit is paid
LITHUANIA	Until child is 3 years old	100% up 1year or 70% for 1yr + 40% for second year	€1,379 per month 3.2 time's average insured monthly income	142€ per month	If insured for 12 months during last 24 months	Part of the benefit is paid 1st year (reduced if any earnings) and fully 2nd year

Johanna Lammi-Taskula provided further Baltic-Nordic comparison by presenting also data on Sweden and Finland. Statistics shows that Baltic States are still behind regarding the overall economic wellbeing - the GDP is lower, the poverty higher, and employment rates lower in the Baltic States than in Sweden and Finland. At the same time the generosity of the leave schemes in the Baltics exceeds the one in Sweden and Finland, both in terms of the duration and payment. Moreover Johanna pointed out that the take-up of parental and paternity leave in the Baltic States is remarkably lower than in Sweden and Finland. This does once again show that the Baltics have moved from the Soviet leave schemes towards to Nordic model, but only partially – the gender equality aspects are dismissed. See the data provided by Johanna [here \(.pptx\)](#)

An open critical discussion provoked by a recent research paper by Dahl, G., Loken, K., Mogstad, M. and Salvanes, K. (2013) '[What is the case for paid maternity leave?](#)' that offers a critical view of Norwegian leave policy was led by prof **Elin Kvande** (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim) and discussant prof. **Diane Gabrielle-Tremblay** (Télé-université, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada).

Ann-Zofie Duvander from University of Stockholm added another dimension to the discussions by looking at the demographic consequences of Nordic family policies. The project asked if fathers' parental leave use associated with union dissolution and if this association changes over time. The preliminary results of the project can be found [here](#).

For further information and in-depth analysis of the development of leave policies in the Nordic countries and Estonia, as well as several other countries see the book [Politics of Leave Policies](#), edited and written by the members of the Leave Network.



The gender equality aspects

Another focus of the seminar was the gender equality and how the leave policies contribute to gender (in)equality. **Helene Dearing** from Vienna University of Economics and Business took a comparison of leave policies to another level and asked how to assess European leave policies regarding their compliance with an ideal leave model and if there is one. See her analysis and results presented [here \(pptx\)](#). The presentation was discussed by prof. **Linda Haas** (Indiana University-Indianapolis) and **Maurizio Mosca** from European Institute from Gender Equality ([EIGE](#)). Maurizio Mosca also introduced EIGE's work on Good Practices in the area of Reconciliation (see his [presentation](#)).

WHAT IS THE INTERNATIONAL LEAVE POLICIES AND RESEARCH NETWORK?

[International Network on Leave Policies and Research](#) connects experts from 35 countries from Europe, but also from Australia, Canada, United States, Japan and other countries across the world. The experts share an interest in and knowledge of leave policies and research into these policies. The network was established at a seminar held in Brussels in October 2004 and it is coordinated by Fred Deven and Peter Moss. The full list of members of network can be seen [here](#).

The purpose of the Network is to exchange of information about leave policies adopted in individual countries and by international organisations, to carry out cross-national analysis of such policies, provide a forum for the cross-national discussion of issues and trends in policy and research and provide a source of regularly updated information on policies and research. The network pays particular attention to employment-related policies intended to support parents and others with care responsibilities (including for adult relatives), including: maternity, paternity and parental leaves; leave to care for sick or disabled relatives; and entitlements to work reduced hours.

See more: www.leavenetwork.org

Regional and national policy developments

Each year number of the participant countries presents their latest developments in the leave policies and also results from the latest research. This year the latest developments and research of the leave and childcare policies from Russia, Scotland, Slovenia, Austria, Germany, Finland, Poland and Croatia were shared.

For the first time we had a pleasure to welcome an expert from **Russia**, **Oxana Sinyavskaya** from the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. She introduced us with the Russian leave policy which is similar to Baltic models in its 3-year long total duration out of which 1.5-years is paid, although somewhat lower than in the Baltics. Russia is one of the very few countries where the minimum parental leave benefits are differentiated according to the birth order of the child. See more from her presentation [here](#).

As the seminar took place at the very interesting time for Scotland – at the very date of the independence referendum - **Dr. Alison Koslowski** from the University of Edinburgh introduced the most recent policy debates in **Scotland** and explained how affordable childcare was a central policy issue for the Yes campaign.

Nada Stropnik (Institute for Economic Research, Ljubljana, Slovenia) introduced a new Parental Protection and Family Benefits Act that was implemented in September 2014 in **Slovenia**. The changes can be seen as small steps towards increasing fathers leave rights – individual right to parental leave was introduced and paid paternity leave was prolonged by 15 have to be taken while the mother is not on parental leave. The [presentation](#) provides you more details of the changes made and the content of the political discussions prior to the changes were made.

Dr. Sonja Blum from Austrian Institute for Family Studies at the University of Vienna introduced recent developments in **Austria and Germany** and analysed the process of policy transfer. She discusses how the creation of German parental leave in 2007 was influenced by the policies of Nordic countries and how, in turn the Austrian income-dependent childcare benefit that was introduced in 2010 can be seen as a policy transfer from Germany (see her [presentation](#) that is based on the [article](#) “No need to reinvent the wheel: family policy transfers in Germany and Austria” published in the Policy Studies in 2014.



Dr. **Minna Salmi** and dr. **Johanna Närvi** (National Institute for Health and Welfare, Finland) discussed the results from the new family leave data in Finland and particularly the situation of the mothers of two-year-olds. They introduced the two corner-stones of Finnish family policy – the homecare allowance and day care services – and the proposals that the government has presented regarding these cornerstones. They provided a comprehensive analysis of the data to raise questions regarding the possible effect of these reforms. See more from the [presentation](#).

Dr. Anna Kurowska from **Poland** (University of Warsaw) presented the major reform of Polish parental and maternal leaves in 2013. As one of the purposes of the reforms was to tackle the low fertility rate she posed a question: “Can we expect an increase in fertility in Poland as a result of the extension of maternity leave?” Results of her analysis leave us with some doubt if the reforms indeed will have expected positive impact on the childbearing in Poland.

Ivana Dobrotic from the University of Zagreb introduced us the main characteristics of the early childhood education and leave policies in **Croatia**. She pointed out that there are several issues with the current organization of the policies, namely large regional differences in the availability, affordability and quality of the early childhood education and care and the issue remains low on political agenda. This has an impact on the employment rate of women and mothers. She also discusses the role of grandparents and cultural norms on childcare in Croatia. More data is available in her [presentation](#).

Fathers on home alone leave

Prof Karin Wall from the University of Lisbon in **Portugal** introduced a project on Fathers on Leave where many of the Network members are involved. This is a research on fathers taking “home alone leave”, implying daylong care for a baby while the mother works. With eleven countries involved (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, Canada, Japan), the project also seeks to compare fathers’ experiences of leave alone in different policy contexts. The project looks at the understandings and experiences of fathers taking this more radical form of ‘leave alone’. The question is if it is possible to identify the social processes which structure their experiences (e.g. bonding, caregiving, playing, learning, negotiation, doing/undoing gender)? Is there diversity? What are the consequences for the mother, father and the family? Some of the first results from the interviews were presented.



One of the countries in the projects is **Japan** and **Hideki Nakazato** from Kobe University presented the leave policies and the first results of the research that has been carried out in Japan. Fathers taking parental leave in Japan are very rare and the question is what characterizes these fathers? Hideki discussed how these fathers were able to deal with the income reduction, negative impact on his working life and negative reactions. He showed that fathers on leave in Japan are pioneers who

are very special in their resources and opportunities. However, their experiences have a potential to trigger the change in the concept of gender division of labour at work and at home. See more [here](#).

The book on the results of the study will be edited by Margaret O'Brien and Karin Wall and it will be published in 2015.

Contributions from the international organisations

Each year, some international organizations present the members of Leave Network their work. IN addition to EIGE that was mentioned already earlier, the representatives from COFACE, European Commission and United Nations were present. We had valuable contributions from [COFACE](#) (Confederation of Family Organizations in the EU) and **Agnes Uhreczky** who presented the key activities that **COFACE** had planned for year 2014, including the campaign for Year of Reconciling Work and Family Life in Europe.

Representative of **European Commission, Muriel Bissières** introduced the recent developments of men and women in EU. She introduced an overview of the situation after European Parliament election and changes in the European Commission, recent development in the framework of the European strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015. Among other issues she pointed out how EU2020 strategy promotes the gender equality through country specific recommendations. She also concluded that progress toward gender equality has been made, but at slow rate and at this rate it will take over 70 years to make equal pay a reality and brought up several challenges that we face. See more in her [presentation](#).

Margaret O'Brien spoke of **United Nations** 20th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family which has three priorities: confronting family poverty, promoting intergenerational solidarity, and ensuring work & family balance. United Nations has an extensive global informal and formal programme of activities and outputs. The main challenge remains to "recognise the contribution and responsibility of men to families, develop policies to address the impact of the absence of males /fathers on family wellbeing and promote active fatherhood"

MORE FROM LEAVE NETWORK

The annual review on leave policies: http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports

News on leave policies and research <http://www.leavenetwork.org/news>

Previous annual seminars and presentations

http://www.leavenetwork.org/archive_2005_2009/annual_seminars

All presentations of the 11th annual seminar

http://www.leavenetwork.org/latest_annual_seminar/presentations

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