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Unwrapping the Nordic parental leave package

Abstract

International comparisons commonly affirm that current Nordic leave arrangements for parents are belonging to the same policy regime. Characteristically, leaves are rather long, replacement rates are high, leaves can be taken up flexibly and parts of the leaves are reserved for fathers, the so-called ‘daddy quotas’ (except for Denmark). Taking a comparative historical approach, we study how the national policy reform paths of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden have evolved. We differentiate between the various policy elements constituting the leave packages in each country and their rationales, e.g. obligatory maternity leave (labour protection), extended maternity leave (breastfeeding, mothers’ and childrens’ wellbeing), protection against dismissals during the leave and pregnancy (mothers’ rights to work), maternity-parental leave benefits (gender equality as workers and citizens, paternity leave (fathers as co-carers,) and parental leave and father’s quota (independent carers and gender equality). We also investigate the timing of the various policy elements in each country. We discuss how national particularities continue to influence policy debates and policy proposals.