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# Reform process of the parental leave policy in Finland

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**Country and/or location of implementation:** Finland

**Instances and/or legal framework responsible for its implementation:** Executive branch, Ministry of Economics and Employment, Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

The current process of amending the legislation in force in Finland with respect to maternity, paternity, and parental leave, is an example of how public policies can be improved and respond more adequately to the needs for equality between men and women. Although the legislation currently in force could be considered “generous” in the paid care time available to both mothers and fathers, it is not possible to characterize it as strictly equal in the

**Table 4. Number of subsidies initiated for postnatal parental leave and leave transfers to the father per year.**

YEAR	N° OF SUBSIDIES INITIATED	N° OF LEAVE TRANSFERS	LEAVE TRANSFERRED / INITIATED SUBSIDIES
2011	22,321	1	0.00%
2012	91,248	292	0.32%
2013	96,105	278	0.29%
2014	101,981	218	0.21%
2015	105,113	225	0.21%
2016	100,807	190	0.19%
2017	97,465	193	0.20%
2018	95,439	224	0.23%
2019	96,451	251	0.26%
<b>Total</b>	<b>806,930</b>	<b>1,872</b>	<b>0.23%</b>

**Source:** Benvin, et al., 2020.

distribution of parenting time and tasks between both parents. In general, these leave policies have lagged behind the new family models. It is therefore interesting to analyze where family leave policy is heading in this Nordic country.

"The leave currently available to mothers is 105 days, while that of fathers is down to 54. Added to this is another six months [of parental leave] that the parents decide how to use (they can share it, have just one parent use it, etc.)" (ABC, 2020). However, by not establishing a non-transferable use clause, only 11% of the total available leave is used by fathers. Compared to the other Nordic countries, this is the lowest figure alongside Denmark, with Sweden and Iceland making use of 30% of the total leave and Norway using 20% (Vila, 2020).

The Finnish government, headed by Prime Minister Sanna Marin, strongly promoted the reform of the current leave system. Finland's executive branch is led by five women who represent the leadership of the five parties that make up the government coalition. Among them is Prime Minister Sanna Marin, who surprised the world by becoming the world's youngest prime minister at the age of 34.

The new model, which would come into effect in 2021, puts children at the center of the debate and promotes welfare and gender equality, says Aino-Kaisa Peko-nen, Minister of Social Affairs and Health. The new measure will be implemented by eliminating the traditional differentiation between maternity and paternity leave: both will disappear to make way for "family leave". (ABC, 2020)

The main beneficiaries of this practice are the children, and the project's aim is to ensure their well-being, the right to be cared for, and to spend quality time with their parents. In this regard, the Minister of Social Affairs and Health said:

"The family leave reform is first and foremost about promoting the interests of the child. The new family leave model will treat all children equally, regardless of family type. It would encourage families to share childcare responsibilities more equally, which would give both parents a good start in building a close relationship with their sons and daughters" [...] "This reform is an opportunity to build a family leave scheme in line with the current family concept," the

minister has stated, who also underlined the commitment to a “gender-neutral language suitable for all types of families.” (Vila, 2020).

The measure is a social milestone in several regards. The most obvious is that it establishes a parameter of complete equality between male and female parents. Also, it considers diverse families, for example, couples formed by two men or two women, or single-parent families with a single mother or father (El Economista, 2020).

It should be noted this reform is based on the right of children to receive care and, in addition, is based on the right of parents to care for their children. On the other hand, it cannot be ignored that Finland's birth rate has also been the lowest among Nordic countries, reporting a birth rate of 1.4 children, in addition to an accelerated aging of the population (Vila, 2020). The reform's objectives are:

- To split family leave and caregiving responsibilities equally between both parents in a family.
- To strengthen non-discrimination and equality in working life, and
- to narrow the gender pay gap (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2021b).

The new leave scheme sets forth the following:

Each parent has a quota of 160 days of paid care (there are six days of paid care per week). In total, the parental benefit would be paid for 12.8 months per child. One parent could transfer up to 63 days of their quota to the other parent. For the final stage of pregnancy, a 40-day pregnancy allowance would be available. This means, overall, that paid care days would amount to more than 14 months. Single parents will be entitled to use the parental benefit shares of both parents. Twins, triplets, and other children from multiple births will constitute the only exception to this model: the quota for their parents would increase by 78 days of daily allowance per second child and each child thereafter. Under this new family leave model, parents would be able to use these leaves until the child turns two years old. Paid care days can be used over several periods. Only pregnancy leave days would be used in a single continuous period and would begin 14 to 30 days before the estimated date of delivery. All parents who have custody of their child would have the same right to leave regardless of whether they are biological or adoptive, custodial or non-custodial, and regardless of the sex of the parent. (Finnish Government, 2021).

In addition, these leaves are maintained and combined with other family policies in place, such as early childhood education and care services; childcare centers; a basket of welcome items for the newborn; flexible childcare leave such as reduced working hours to 80% or less; and receiving an allowance while the child is under 3 years old; plus, childcare leave at home:

One parent may stay at home to devote full time to the care of a child under three years of age and receive an allowance, which is usually less than the parental leave allowance (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2021a).

The implemented process of debate and reform is quite interesting. The proposal was worked on by a tripartite group consisting of the Ministry of Economy and Employment, the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. This team has completed and published the draft proposal for family leave reform, which was made available for public comment between February 19 and April 2, 2021 (Government of Finland and Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2021). Subsequently, the group planned to publish a summary of the comments received in order to work on the final proposal and submit it to Parliament in the Fall of 2021 (Kela, 2021). The new family leave system was expected to be in place by August 2022 (Kela, 2021).

Regarding the expected results, the Minister of Social Affairs stated that the reform will bring about a great change in attitudes as it will improve equality between parents and make life easier for diverse families:

“Sharing parental responsibilities in everyday life will be easier, and the bond between the two parents and their child will be strengthened from the earliest age,” they elaborated (El Economista, 2020). The reform would have a series of effects, some of which can only be measured in the long term. It would have an impact on families and their children, but also on working life and society as a whole. A more equitable distribution of family leave is expected to have a positive effect on women’s careers and position in the labor market. The reform broadens the freedom of choice for families with regard to the use of parental allowance. It also improves equality between children from different types of families and their opportunities for parental care (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2021a).

**For more information, visit** [valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/1271139/draft-government-proposal-for-family-leave-reform-completed](https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/1271139/draft-government-proposal-for-family-leave-reform-completed)