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Stream 18: Family policy in transition

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*Nordic parenthood policies and politics: Contradictions of
choice and active fatherhood*

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Introduction

The Nordic family of nations is well known for their extensive family policies and support to parents in providing and caring for their children. One of the most important components in policies on parenthood is the care support to parents of young children, in the form of leave and day care services (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006; Eydal and Gíslason, 2010). The care policies do serve a double goal, on one hand to ensure the best interest of children and on other hand to contribute to gender equality in the family as well as in the labour market. The Nordic countries score high on international scales measuring gender equality and the comparative literature shows that the Nordic countries enjoy both high female labour force participation and high fertility rates (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011a; 2011b).

Nordic child-care services and parental leave schemes thus play an important part in the model of dual earners and dual carers, providing both parents opportunity to work and care. However, in recent years we have in the Nordic countries witnessed the introduction of cash for care schemes with the aim to facilitate parental choice and local flexibility in day care service delivery. Since 2008 cash for care has been implemented in all the Nordic countries, as either a national statutory right (Finland and Norway), or as a local municipality level entitlement (Sweden, Denmark and Iceland) (Rantalaiho, 2010). This political development seems to go against the Nordic dual earner/dual carer model and ideals of gender equality, in supporting parental (maternal) care of the child in the home.

The aim of the paper is to take a closer look at what appears to be somewhat contradictory aims of the Nordic policies of supporting parental care for children in the home in the two schemes of parental leave and cash-for-care, and especially how the two policies seem to contradict each other in the creation of gender (in)equality. The paper considers all five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) and discusses in particular the development of the cash for care schemes as they represent what Sipilä et al (2010) call the newcomers in the history of social policy and thus are well less accounted for in recent care research.

In the paper we examine how the parental leave and cash for care schemes in all the five Nordic countries have been implemented and taken up by parents. Furthermore, the paper will also discuss the part played by national party politics in order to seek answers to the question how the contradictory policies came about. As Kamerman and Gabiel (2010) note the choice between a cash benefit and care service continues to be a significant political issue in many countries and often Conservative, Christian democratic and Liberal parties have tended to favour cash benefits and also tax credits while Social Democrats have tended to favour services. As this paper discusses, political parties in the Nordic countries have also followed this line in regards to cash for care, while they have been less conventional in regards to their support for parental leave and especially for the elements facilitating gender equality, the father's quotas. We also consider the role of day care services and argue that there is general support among all political parties for the extensive day care provision that is available in all countries today. The real political controversies instead seem to be over the introduction of the gender equality incentives of the father's quota and in the policy of cash for care, which has proven to run counter to aims of gender equality in having reinforced that mothers become the main provider of care for children.

The analysis in the paper is based on official statistics, policy and attitude studies and draws on work in the project *Föräldradighet, omsorgspolitik och jämställdhet i Norden*, commissioned by the Nordic Council. ¹

The first section of the paper investigates the development of the father's quotas in parental leave schemes in the Nordic countries and outlines the variation in the elements of the policies of present day, followed by an account of the day care systems before moving on to a presentation and discussion of the cash for care schemes. The paper finalizes with a discussion of how we are to understand the importance of the father's

¹ We would like to thank Ann-Zophie Duvander, Berit Brandt, Johanni Lammi-Taskula and project leader Ingolfur V. Gíslason for stimulating discussions and help with literature. The article also draws on work in *REASSESS* (Reassessing the Nordic welfare model, a Centre of Excellence in welfare research), in which both authors participate. We also thank Bergdís Ýr Guðmundsdóttir for her help with collecting data and with references.

quotas and the cash for care schemes as an element in the Nordic model of gender equality and Nordic familism.

1. Paid parental leave in Nordic countries

The Nordic countries have from the very beginning been among the first to address how to accommodate that men and women could both participate in paid work as well as in unpaid care work. The Nordic countries were thus pioneers in developing paid maternity leave (Gauthier, 1996) and more importantly in the 1970s and 1980s were among the first nations to develop schemes of paid parental leaves that provided both parents the opportunity to choose how they would divide the leave period between them (first introduced in Sweden in 1972).

However, despite being available for both parents, mothers have continued to use the major part of the paid parental leave. Drawing lessons from this development, in the early 1990s the idea to define part of the paid parental leave as father's quota was put forward in order to ensure that men took more leave. Norway was the first country to enact such father's quota into law in 1992 followed by Sweden in 1995 and Iceland in 2000. Denmark had a similar policy in the years 1998-2002 but the law was abolished by a government right of the centre (Rostgaard, 2002). Finland only provides rights to fathers for few weeks (Duvander and Lammi-Taskula, 2010) (See Table 1).

Table 1. Child care leave in Nordic countries, percentage of income and covered weeks of entitlements 1st of July 2011, maternity, paternity and parental leave

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
% of income	100	70	80/75*	100/80	80
Total weeks	50-64	44	39	47-57	69
- only mother (maternity leave)	18	18	13	9	8

- only father (paternity leave	0	(4)**	13	12	8
- father with mother (parental leave)	2	3	0	2	2

Sources: Fæðingarorlofssjóður, n.d.; Kela, n.d.,f; NAV, n.d.,b; Nordic Social-Statistical Committee, 2008, p. 30; 2010.

*80% of salaries up to 200.00 ISK and 75% for salaries above 200.000 ISK.

** If fathers take a least 12 working days of the joint period they do get 1-24 additional working days of leave.

During the 2000s the number of days with paid parental leave in the Nordic countries has increased by 30 per cent (Nordic Statistical Yearbook, 2010). Both Norway and Sweden have gradually increased the individual entitlements of fathers. In Sweden paid parental leave is paid for 480 days with each child. If the parents have joint custody they are each entitled to 240 days but they are free to give the other parents their entitlements except for 60 days that are reserved for each parent (Duvander and Lammi-Taskula, 2010). In Norway the period was last increased 1st of July 2011. The total period can be 57 weeks with 80% payment or 47 weeks with 100% payment. Of these the parents can share as they like 36 weeks with 80% payment or 26 weeks with 100% payment. 12 weeks will be reserved for the father and these rights are lost if not used by the father. Under certain circumstances the fathers quota can be transferred to the mother, e.g. in cases where the mother has sole custody, the father is sick, if mother or father do not meet the requirement of income for at least 6 out of 10 months (Lov om folketrygd (folketrygdloven), no. 19/1997; NAV, n.d.,b).

In Iceland the legislation from 2000 ensured both parents 3 months individual entitlements to paid parental leave each and 3 months in addition which the parents could divide among themselves (Lög um fæðingarorlof nr. 95/2000). The total number of weeks, 39 is lower than in the other Nordic countries. The coalition that came into power in 2007 stated in its policy declaration that it intended to extend the maternity/paternity leave in phases and the discussions prior to the election centred around a total period of 12 months (Eydal and Gíslason, 2008). In December 2008, this same government was forced

to propose reductions in social expenditures including the amounts paid to parents in parental leave due to the economic crisis in Iceland (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011b).

As table 2 shows it has been especially the countries that have provided increased individual entitlements for fathers which have experienced an increase in uptake of days taken by fathers, which indicates that the father's quota is a successful policy element if the aim is to increase gender equality in leave take-up (See also Haas and Rostgaard, 2011).

Table 2. Nordic countries, paid parental leave, % of total number of days taken by men, 2009.

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
2000	5.5	4.1	3.3	7.2	13.7
2009	7.3	6.7	33.9	11.6	23.1

Source: Nordic Statistical Yearbook, 2010, table 4.4.

How can the differences in policy line between the Nordic countries be explained? Since the countries share common historical and cultural heritage it seems relevant to investigate the politics – and to ask what role political parties have played in the care policy making?² Can the different policies be explained by different politics? In accordance with political theory we would expect more support from parties left of the centre to extensive rights to paid parental leave as well as support with the policies that do encourage the dual earner/dual carer model as part of the Social Democratic welfare state in contrast to policies that encourages gendered division of labour in line with “traditional” or conservative family policies (Ellingsæter and Leira 2006; Leira, 2006; Ellingsæter, 2011).

² By discussing only the part played by the political parties we leave out important actors in policy making, however the paper does not allow us to discuss all relevant actors. Please see e.g. Rantalaaho 2009; Korsvik, 2011.

As already pointed out above the 2-weeks father's quota implemented in Denmark in 1998 by a centre-left wing government, was abolished by a coalition government right of the centre already in 2002 (Rostgaard, 2002). The government argued that the father's quota constituted a state coercion on what ought to be a private decision of the parents (Borchorst, 2006). This policy line has continued and also constitutes the present right of the center government's position to the father's quota today.

The Norwegian parental leave scheme, dating from 1993, was based on proposals from the Labour Party and enacted by a Labour government. In 2000s the fathers quota in Norway has been gradually extended from 6 weeks to 12 weeks by the Red-Green coalition government (the Labour Party, The Socialist left Party and the Center Party) (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2010). There has been fierce opposition from both the Conservative Party and the Progressive Party on the issue, both wanting families to be able to choose for them-selves how to divide the leave between the parents (Brandth and Kvande, 2009). The Red-Green coalition parties kept their majority in the Parliament in the election 2009. The oppositional Conservative Party did announce in May 2010 that it wanted to abolish the fathers quota since it worked against the interests of the families, and was thereby in an agreement on the issue with the other major oppositional party, the Progress Party (*Aftenposten*, 5. May, 2010). According to Ellingsæter (2011) gender equality and family matters are issues that bring out the most intensive political debates in the Norwegian politics, thus the debate on fathers rights to individual entitlement to paid parental leave will most likely be an important issue before the next elections in 2013.

Sweden has provided the most comprehensive paid parental leave schemes from 1974 when the Social Democrats proposed in Parliament that maternity leave should be changed into parental leave. However it was the Liberal Party that proposed for a special father's month in 1995, and that proposal was enacted into law by a government right of the centre. The second month was enacted into law by a Social Democratic government in 2002 (Cronholm, 2009). In 2006, a new four party coalition right of the centre came into power and implemented a new family policy reform including special bonus payments in order to increase fathers take up in paid parental leave (Duvander and Lammi-Taskula, 2010). Parties right of the centre did also propose the bill on equal rights of both parents

to paid parental leave in Iceland, even though parties left of the centre and the Women's Alliance had already introduced such proposals without success (Eydal and Gíslason, 2008). Furthermore as already pointed out above, a coalition of the Independence Party right of the centre and the SD-alliance had written in their white paper that paid parental leave should be extended further but the economic crisis in 2008 did lead to cut-backs instead of an increase of social rights (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2010b). There is thus in Sweden a broad political support to the individual rights of fathers to paid parental leave, but it will be interesting to see how the extension of the leave will be organized, no proposals have so far been introduced on this issue by the ruling coalition left of the centre.

In Finland, ideas about increased entitlements of fathers to paid parental leave have been debated for years but there have been few actual changes. According to Lammi-Taskula and Takala (2009), the fact that the main actors have been the central employers and employees organisations has made the role of governments and politicians more passive. Furthermore, that fact that the leave policies have been part of social packages has also contributed to few changes in the leave policies since the parliament has not been able to make changes after there has been a tripartite agreement on ratifying what the employers and employees have already negotiated. Lammi- Taskula and Takala also point out that the position of the political parties has been quite clear, proposals regarding increased possibilities of fathers has been "more positively viewed by left-wing and liberal political parties than by the (Agrarian) Centre Party or the more conservative right-wing parties" (2009:99). In March 2011 a working group working group on parental leave appointed by the Ministry of social affairs and Health, recommended among other things increased entitlements for fathers (*Social och hälsovårdsministeriet*, n.d.). In June 2011 a new right-left coalition of the National Coalition Party, Social Democratic Party, Left Alliance, Green League, Swedish People's Party and Christian Democrats came into power (Finnish government, n.d.). It is too early to say how the broad political spectrum of the government will influence the balance between the government and the partners in labour market- and/or if the parties left of the centre will be able to influence their co-workers in government about the necessity of fathers quota.

Thus, it seems that the political parties have taken quite different positions on the issue of individual entitlements in parental leave, e.g. the road towards individual

entitlements for fathers in Iceland and Sweden does not fit the theoretical model, since the idea has in both cases been promoted and accepted by governments right of the centre. However, in the case of Denmark and Norway it is clear that there is a left/right division on the issue of individual rights of fathers, thus the political theory is quite relevant regarding the policies in these two countries.

2. Day care in Nordic countries

Day care in the Nordic countries is characterised by its integration of care and education and for the universal approach in coverage. The finance of the services is tax-based and the parents pay low user fees. The Nordic model is also characterised by its decentralised structure of service organisation, thus the local authorities are responsible for the interpretation and implementation of broadly defined national policy. Day care is usually organised as institutional care or as family day care, provided within a family setting. Except for Iceland, all the Nordic countries provide legal entitlement to day care for younger children as a day care guarantee (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2010a; 2011a, 2011b).

During the 2000s there has been a constant increase in volumes in all the Nordic countries, even though the volumes for the children under the age of three are quite different among the countries as following table 3 shows (Nordic Statistical Yearbook, 2010). The take-up of day care for the young children in the Nordic countries has in recent years been well above the EU average of 20 % of the age group 0-2 years, although the timing of the use of day care can differ extensively in the Nordic countries. I.e. while it is common for Danish children to attend day care already from the end of the parental leave when the child is 1 year old, only 40% of Finish children between 3 and 6 are enrolled in public day care. Denmark has over the years been in the lead with the provision of day care and this not only for the young children under one year, but also for the 1-2 year olds, of whom 48 % were attending day care in Denmark by the mid-1995s, compared to 18-37% in other Nordic countries. Part of the explanation for different volumes of day care among

the countries is, however, the variation in length of parental leave across the Nordic countries and in the cash for care schemes (see further the section below on cash for care).

Table 3. Nordic countries, children in day care 2009.

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
Per cent of age group					
0 years	15.1	0.9	7.2	4.4	0.0
1 years	88.0	29.0	67.5	69.8	49.5
2 years	92.4	50.3	93.8	85.8	90.9
3 years	97.6	67.1	95.3	96.1	95.0
4 years	97.5	73.5	95.7	97.0	97.7
5 years	95.1	77.1	91.4	97.9	98.0

Source: Nordic Statistical Yearbook, 2010, table 4.3.

Historically the issue of day care services has been debated in the Nordic countries. E.g. Morgan (2009) points out that there has been strong conservative resistance to mothers working while their children are young in both Finland and Norway. While day care facilitates the participation of parents in the labour market, but the importance of children's needs for not only care but also education has been growing in all the Nordic countries and the day care services have moved from social services to being part of the educational system with increased emphasis on learning (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2010a).

The political theory can be helpful when analysing the different development of day care from a historical perspective but it has limited explanatory power today, due to the fact that the importance of day care services and preschools is not a debated political issue as such in the Nordic countries (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011b).

3. Cash for care schemes in the Nordic countries

In addition to the day care services and paid parental leave schemes, the Nordic countries have within recent years all developed schemes of cash grants for childcare, payments to

parents of young children that are paid after paid parental leave and until the child has been enrolled in public day care (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2010a; Sipila et al, 2010).

Despite the comprehensive Nordic statistics, collected and published jointly on social affairs, there are no comparable statistics available on the take up rates of the cash for child care (NOSOSKO, 2009). There also exists only little research on cash for care, and the Nordic research has mainly concentrated on Finland and Norway due to the recent implementation of the schemes in Denmark and Sweden (See Rantalaiho, 2009; Sipilä et al, 2010 and exceptions). In the following, we account for the variation in the elements of cash for care policies in the Nordic countries and the political background for their introduction.

Denmark

Denmark was among the first to establish a cash for care scheme (*Børnepasningsorlov*) which was introduced in 1992. Denmark was at that point in time experiencing high unemployment rates and the scheme was a part of active labour market policies to provide some dynamics in the provision of labour. The idea was to enable parents of young children to take leave of absence from labour market and stay home with their young children for a period of 26-52 weeks. The parents would provide room for other workers with no care obligations in the labour market. The scheme quickly became very popular among parents of young children. The payments were originally 80% of the unemployment benefit but were decreased to 60% in 1998. In 2002 the scheme was abolished (Rostgaard and Fridberg, 1998; Rostgaard, 2002) as part of an overall policy revision by the government, a coalition right of the centre. In relation to the revision, the payment for parental leave was increased in order to compensate for the loss of leave weeks. Municipalities were also given the possibility to pay out so-called *Tilskud til pasning af egne barn*, or cash for care of own children (Rostgaard, 2002; Abrahamson and Wehener, 2008). The government emphasised the need for providing the families flexibility and choice so they could organise work and care in accordance with their needs and wishes. Furthermore the aim was to provide the municipalities with more flexible ways of organising day care and the new law it was now also possible for the municipalities to provide benefits to pay for private day care and other forms of day care

(*Dagtilbudsloven* nr. 501/2007). The law was enacted by a government right of the centre. The idea of enacting the cash for care scheme was debated, e.g. the organization of public employers criticized the idea and said in their letter to the Parliament that the negative consequences of such scheme would be long absence of women from labour market and that traditional ideas regarding the care being the primary responsibility of the mother would be enforced. Furthermore it was pointed out that the children in families of immigrants were likely to be cared for at home instead of staying in day care centres where their skills in Danish language would improve (*Forbundet af Offentligt Ansatte*, 2002).

In Denmark, municipalities are not obliged but may decide to enact the scheme on cash for care. The municipalities finance the scheme and parents have to apply for the benefits locally (*Dagtilbudsloven* nr. 501/2007). In 2011 39 out of 98 (40%) municipalities offered parents cash for care of own children (*De kommunale nøgletal*, n.d.). Furthermore, by examining the number of municipalities that did offer cash for care in 2007 in comparison to 2011 reveals that 27% of the municipalities have made changes 12% of those that did not offer cash for care in 2007 do so in 2011 and 15% did offer schemes in 2007 but have closed them down in 2011 as following table 4 shows.

Table 4. Municipalities in Denmark with cash for care schemes in 2007 and 2011

	n	%
No scheme 2007, scheme in 2011	12	12
Scheme in 2007, no scheme in 2011	15	15
No scheme in 2007 and 2011	44	45
Scheme in 2007 and 2011	27	28
Total	98	100

Source: *De kommunale nøgletal*, n.d. Own calculations.

The national rules specify entitlement rules but the amount of the benefit is a local decision apart from that it may not exceed 85 % of the cheapest net cost for a day care place. The national rules specify that the parents of children between the age of 6 months to 3 years old can apply for the benefit, if they are not holding another type of income at

the same time and the parents have applied for a place in a day care institution or with a family day carer (*vuggestue or dagpleje*). The benefits can be paid for minimum 8 weeks and maximum one year (*Vejledning om dagtilbud, fritidshjem og klubtilbud, 2009*). The municipality must during the period of the eight first weeks perform a pedagogical assessment in the family, in order to inspect the welfare of the child and to see how child is being cared for. In cases where it can be argued that the child would benefit more from special support in day care rather than care in the home, the benefit will not be paid. If parents no longer wish to make use of the cash for care scheme, the municipality must provide a day care place.

All families are entitled to the benefit, but the parent in question must not receive any other labour market related cash benefits, such as social assistance, educational grants and unemployment benefit while receiving the cash for care benefit, and the parent must not be working. The other parent must not be in receipt of social assistance or other social benefits which require active participation on the labour market (according to the *Aktivloven nr. 709/2003*). Furthermore the Danish scheme requires parents who are non-EU citizens to have lived in Denmark in 7 out of the last 8 years (*Vejledning om dagtilbud, fritidshjem og klubtilbud, 2009*).

The benefit varies between municipalities. In 2008 it made up on average across municipalities 4.720 DKK (647 Euro) for 0-2 year olds and 3.245 DKK (445 Euro) for 3-6 year olds (Bureau 2000, 2008). In the case of Copenhagen the monthly payment is somewhat higher in 2011, 7.033 DKK. pr. child (*Københavns kommune, n.d., b*). The maximum payment in the same family is for three children and the total amount cannot be higher than the unemployment benefits. The payment is subject for taxation (*Socialdepartementet, 2007*).

In Denmark very few parents make use of the scheme, and the number has not changed much over the years. In 2004 the benefits was paid to 768 children and in 2008 to 764 children (*Dagplejens placering i viften av dagtilbud, 2008; Bureau 2000, 2008*). Thus very few Danish parents do seem to make use of the possibility of cash for care. Rantalaiho, (2009) notes that the main explanation for the low take up rate is the strong position of the day care services and parents believe that it is important for the child (Kremer, 2006

in Rantalaaho, 2009, see also Bockhorst, 2006). The fact that there are quite strict conditions that the parents have to fulfil in order to get the benefits is also likely to influence the take up rates (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2010a).

Finland

Finland has like Denmark followed the conventional pattern with it mainly being right-wing parties which have argued for cash benefits while left-wing parties have argued for day care services (Sipila and Korpinen 1998; Mikkola 1991). Finland was the first Nordic country to enact a scheme on cash for care of children in 1985 and since 1990 parents of all children under the age of three have had the right to choose between day care and home care allowances. The scheme was implemented nationally with identical entitlements and benefits across the municipalities. The scheme was called *Kotihoidon tuki* in Finnish and translated into English as Home care allowance (*Kela* n.d., a).

The importance of a providing choice for parents was discussed in Finland already in the 1960s, when the provision of day care of young children became an issue. It was then emphasised that mothers, and later both parents, should have the possibility to choose, between care in the home and care in day care institutions (Salmi, 2006). Besides the importance of choice, equality between parents was also an argument for introducing the original schemes, e.g it was emphasised that parents in rural areas often did not have access day care services. In the 2000s the importance of parental choice has been the main argument for the changes implemented to the scheme (Rantalaaho, 2009).

In addition to the Finish state scheme of home care allowances paid by the National Insurance Institution, *Kela*, municipalities may also grant a special municipal supplement (*Kela*, n.d.,a). In addition to the home care allowance scheme there is an additional program called the Private Day Care Allowance (PDCA). The PDCA is support to parental payments for private childcare until children start school. It is possible to receive both types of benefits in same family, as well as, in cases of low-income families, the municipal

supplement. An important difference between the two is that the PDCA is always paid to directly to the provider of the services (*Kela*, n.d., b).³

The Finnish cash for care benefit is paid to parents of children under the age of three years. The payment can start immediately after the parental allowance payments end. Benefits are paid until the child reaches the age of three or when the child enters day care or the family make use of private day-care allowances. The parent can choose to stay home with the child or use the benefit to pay a private child minder or a relative to care for the child, thus the parent can be active in the labour market while receiving the care allowances (*Salmi*, 2006; *Kela*, n.d.,b).

In the case of Finland the parents that take child-care leave in order to look after a child under the age of 3 hold full employment security, thus the parents can return to their previous job or a comparable position. According to the law employees have to stay at least one month on leave and they are entitled to two leave periods, but additional periods can be negotiated (*Kela*, n.d., b).

The benefit in Finland (1st of May 2009) was 314 Euros per month for one child, and additional 94 Euros for every other child in the household under three, and 60 Euros for other children at the age of thee – seven years. The benefit can be complemented by an additional sum of a maximum of 168,86 Euros per month, the level depending on the size and income of the family (*Kela*, n.d., a). ⁴

Table 5. Finland: Amount of the cash benefit for childcare, 2011

Child	Monthly amount
First child	315,54€

³ Furthermore there is a third scheme of partial care allowance and partial care leave for parents that reduce their working hours to no more than 30 hours a week on average in order to set aside time for child care (*Kela*, n.d., c).

⁴ As mentioned above, there is an additional scheme, the Private Day Care Allowance (PDCA) and the benefits for private childcare until children start school, is a flat rate amount of 160 Euros and an income and family size related payment up to 134 Euros (*Kela*, n.d., b).

Each additional child under the age of 3	94.47 €
Each additional child under school age	60.46 €

Source: Kela n.d., a.

Some municipalities pay additional extra home care allowance for parents that do not use their entitlements to day care. According to Rantalaiho (2009) the municipalities have different requirements for families that apply for the additional benefits, in most cases that all children in the family under the age of 6 years are cared for at home and that the care taking parent has care leave from a permanent job. Thus, the actual level of home care benefits varies between families and municipalities (Salmi, 2006).

In Finland cash for care benefits are subject to tax and regarded as an outside source of income when student financial aid is determined. Furthermore the benefits may be deducted from unemployment benefits, but if both parents were unemployed they would only be deducted from the parents that receive the cash for care benefits. Similarly if one parent were at home with child and not seeking a job, the unemployment benefits of the spouse would not be affected (Kela, n.d.,a).

Historically the home care allowance has been popular among parents in Finland. In the early 1990s the popularity could partly be explained by the economic crisis and the influenced by the high unemployment rates (Salmi, 2006). However the cash for care programme is still popular in Finland and more than half of the children under three are in care supported by home care allowances as following table 6 shows.

Table 6. Finland: Number of parents with home care allowances in 2007-2010

	2007	2008	2009	2010
Home care allowances number of recipients	65.320	64.520	65.854	65.578

Benefit paid to fathers	3.3%	3.5%	3.7%	3.9%
Total number of children under 3	76.480	75.966	77.478	78.490
% of all children under 3	58	56.9	57.7	57.6

Source: Kela n.d.,d;e.

It is important to note that information about who receives the payment does not provide information about how the parents used the benefit, but in majority of cases it has been used by mother. In the Family Leave Survey, conducted in the year 2001-2, respondents were asked if the home care allowances should be abolished, and only 17 respondents of 3295 females answered yes, thus there is a strong support for the existence of the scheme in Finland (Salmi, 2006). Key questions in terms of the length of the care leave are whether the mother has a permanent job to return to, and whether the labour market offer employment for the mother who has taken leave from a fixed-term job or who has no previous work experience. A fixed-term employment relationship preceding the leave is the most significant factor explaining long periods of home care allowance (Salmi, Lammi-Taskula, Närvi, 2009). A study among the users from the year 2006, reveals that home care allowance was used more by young (age 20-34) lone mothers than married/cohabiting and/or older (age 35+) mothers. Also foreign-born mothers used it slightly more than mothers who were born in Finland. Both young women (who are often students) and immigrant women have a weaker position at the labour market (Haatja, 2010).

Iceland

Iceland differs from all the other countries on the point that there are no laws on cash for care, but from the year 2006 some municipalities have nevertheless implemented their own local schemes of cash for care. In December 2009 13 out of 77 municipalities had enacted home care allowances or cash for care schemes, but there exists no comparable statistics on the take up ratios of the parent (RBF, 2010).

The names, goals and the entitlements of the schemes are quite different in character, but in the following section the scheme enacted in Reykjavik, the capital city

will be used as an example. The main goal of the scheme in Reykjavik was to create equality among the parents that have received a place in day care for their children and those still waiting for place. This is reflected in the rules of entitlements as well as the name of the scheme, *þjónustutrygging*, directly translated to English, *service-insurance* (Reykjavíkurborg, n.d.). Parents in Reykjavík were entitled to the cash for care starting in the case of cohabiting parents at the age of 9 months and 6 months in the case of lone parents, despite the fact that all parents have same rights to paid parental leave regardless of marital status of the parents. Like in the case of Copenhagen, the Iceland parents have to apply for day care in order to be eligible for the care benefit, thus the benefit are first and foremost considered to serve as a bridge between those that have got place in preschool and those that have not, but not as a measure to increase choice. The parents can claim the benefit until the child is two years old. Only in cases where the city failed to provide day care services could the benefits be paid for children that have reached the age of two years (op. cit.).

Furthermore, Reykjavík had one condition that is quite unusual in relation to cash for care benefits: In the case of cohabiting parents, the parents had to divide the payments in line with the rules on the division of paid parental leave, where the mother and father have each three months paid parental leave and additional joint three months. Thus the parents have to divide the payments so that the mother or the father can at most receive 66% of the payments, 33% has to be paid to the other parent. The rules allow the parents to use the cash for care benefits as they wish, e.g. they can both hold paid employment and pay another person to care for the child (Reykjavíkurborg e.d.; Reglur um þjónustutryggingu). It is therefore impossible to regulate how the parents do actually divide the care between them, but at least the message is given that the city encourages both parents to participate in the care (RBF, 2010). In a survey conducted among parents of young children in Reykjavik 90% of the respondents believe that the cash for care scheme was an important addition to the services and that it should be kept. 87% of those that had used the cash for care scheme were pleased with it, but 63% of the respondents believed that the amount of the benefits was too low. In majority of the cases or 63% the parents said that the reason for why they used the cash for care option was that the child had not got place in pre-school (RBF, 2010).

In Reykjavik, the amount of cash for care benefits was in 2009 the same amount for

all families, 35.000 ISK. The benefit was not subject to taxation. (RBF, 2010). The city of Reykjavík has announced that the benefits will be reduced do to the economical crisis to 25.000 from 1st of January 2010 and to 20.000 1st of September. From 1st of April 2011 the scheme was abolished as a part of cuts of expenditures in Reykjavik that has had to face huge budget cuttings in the aftermath of the economic crisis that hit Iceland in autumn 2008 (Reykjavikurborg, n.d.).

Norway

In 1998, a coalition government of parties right of the centre in Norway adopted into legislation the entitlement of *Kontantstøtte*, a cash grant for parents of children less than three years of age. The goal was to increase parental choices and to create equality among families made use of state supported day care and those who did not (*Lov om kontantstøtte til smabarnsforeldre* nr. 73/1997-8). Furthermore an important goal was to create more time for parents to be with their children since the public debate in Norway had revealed that parents thought they had to little time with their parents (Ellingsæter, 2006). The scheme is financed by the state and parents apply for the benefits at the The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) thus the benefit is available on universal basis to all parents in Norway, regardless of where they live.

The system of cash for care in Norway is quite similar to the Finish system except for the fact that the Norwegian parents can also choose part time day care and part time cash for care benefits, which is not possible in the case of Finland. It is not possible to hold a full time placement in day care for the child at the same time as cash benefits for care. The parents are entitled to the cash for care benefits for children form the age one to three years, a maximum period of 23 months. As in Finland the Norwegian parents are free to use the benefits as they choose, either to stay home themselves or to pay others to care for the child. In the case of Norway each parent can ask for leave of absence from work year to care for a child in addition to paid parental leave. The cash for care benefits do not provide entitlements to pension nor any other social entitlements (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006; *Lov om kontantstøtte til smabarnsforeldre* nr. 73/1997-8).

In Norway the benefit the is the same for all, but if the child has place in part time day care the cash for care benefit is paid in accordance with time spent in day care, as following table 7 shows. If parents do have more than one child between the age of one and three they may receive double amount. In Norway the cash for care benefits are not subject to taxation.

Table 7. Norway: Amount of the cash benefit for childcare, 2011

Hours spent in day care	Amount in NOK
0	3.303
1-8	2.642
9-16	1.982
17-24	1.321
25-32	661
33 and more	0

Source: NAV, n.d.

In the case of Norway the cash for care grant scheme has also been quite popular but at the same time the Norwegian scheme has been highly debated (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006). Furthermore, Leira (2002) noted the high take-up of the cash benefit was not only due to choice but also due to the fact that public day care did not meet the demand (See also Lauritzen, 2005). Actually, a study among Norwegian mothers of young children in 1999 showed that they did want more time with their children but they wished for longer paid parental leave and shorter working hours to realize that goal, not cash for care (Hellevik and Koren, in Ellingsæter and Gulbrandsen, 2005). During the 2000s, day care services have been increased, and studies on parents preferences show that they prefer day care, thus the take up rates for cash for care have decreased (E.g. Ellingsæter and

Guldbrandsen, 2005). The following graph shows the constant decline in take up during the period 2000-2010.



Picture 1. Children receiving cash benefit in lieu of day-care attendance. Percentage of all children, as of December. Norway 2000-2010.

Source: Statistics Norway, n.d.

In overwhelming majority of cases it is the mother who takes up benefits and even though the parents take up of the benefit does not provide information on who is actually caring for the child, research shows that in the majority of cases it is the mother who is the main carer of the child. Tveten, Engen and Kvande (2005) point out that this should not come as surprise when the story of Nordic fathers and paid parental leave is kept in mind: In the case of cash for care fathers have to negotiate with their employer and argue for their choice which is a complicated task, thus the fathers do not consider cash for care a realistic way to give them more time with their children. Thus, in turn the number of mothers of children under three in Norway has been affected by the cash for care scheme: According to Rösen (2005) the number of working hours among the mothers was reduced by 3.75 hours compared the reduction of 1.2 hours among fathers between 1998-2002. Similarly

the percentage of mothers in work was reduced from 62-63% in 1998 to 56% in 2002, compared to reduction of the percentage of fathers in work from 95% to 93% for the same period.

But who are the parents that do use the *Kontantstøtte*? Statistics Norway (2007) has shown that take up of cash for care is higher among low income families. Furthermore according to Statistics Norway (2010) the increase in take up rates in day care has first and foremost taken place among the younger children 1-2 year old has increased from 43 to 68 percent from 2004-2008. The take up increase is related both to income and education, the higher income the family relatively higher number of children is in day care. However, the increase was least among the children from the families with the lowest and the highest incomes. In a recent Norwegian study Stefansson and Farstad (2008) interviewed 60 Norwegian parents and concluded that the choice of care model was clearly related to class status of the parents. Middle-class parents believed in the importance of pre-school for young children while working class parents believed it was in the best interest of the children to stay at home in parental care as long as possible. Furthermore, Statistics Norway (2007) also reports that it is more usual that children of parents born in Norway are in day care compared with children of parents born out of Norway.

Sweden

Swedish politicians have discussed the introduction of a cash for care scheme ever since WWII and according to Nyberg (2010), originally with a different policy line than what is conventional: Until the 1970s, it was the liberal party the Moderates which was opposed to cash for care on the grounds that the state should not financially support the natural function of parenthood, while the Social Democratic Party was in favour. This was reversed in the 1970s and since then the more traditional policy lines have been applied: A home care allowance scheme was first enacted in Sweden in 1993 by a coalition government right of the centre but it was abolished when the Social Democrats returned to power in 1994 (*Lag om vårdnadsbidrag* nr. 1994:553; Björnberg and Eydal, 1995).

However, as Chronholm (2009) notes current Swedish family policy is the result of alliance between social democratic and bourgeois ideals which overall has more than any other country favoured gender equality. This is exemplified in that it although it was a coalition consisting of the Moderate, Liberal, Centre, and Christian Democratic parties that introduced the 2008 re-instatement of the cash for care scheme in Sweden, they at the same time introduced the aforementioned gender equality bonus, in order to stimulate men to use a greater share of the parental leave and promote women's return to employment (Nyberg, 2010). The new cash for care scheme introduced in 2008 was named *Vårdnadsbidraget*, (in English Care benefit (*Lag om kommunalt vårdnadsbidrag* nr. 2008:307)). The major argument of the coalition government for enacting the scheme was the importance of families to be able to choose between day care outside or within the family.

The Swedish home care allowance scheme is an option for the municipalities, who may decide if they want to enact the scheme or not. The law is based on the idea of the self-autonomy of the municipalities, thus local authorities in each municipality are those who know best the conditions and needs in their municipality (*Socialdepartementet*, 2007). Thus it is the municipalities enact the schemes for their residents, but the state provides the legal framework. Since each municipality has the possibility to add their own rules in addition the general rules in the laws, the rules of the cash for care scheme in Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, will be used here as a point of reference.

The rules on entitlements in the Swedish laws are quite similar to those in the Norwegian laws: After 250 days of paid parental leave parents in Sweden can apply for cash for care benefits. They get paid full benefit or proportion of full benefit, depending on if the child is in part time day care or not. The Swedish parents are free to use the benefits to stay at home with the child or to pay others to care for the child. However the benefit it is not paid to parents that receive unemployment benefits, paid parental leave, assistance for asylum seekers, sick benefits or old age pension (*Förslag till lag om kommunalt vårdnadsbidrag*, Prop. 2007/08:91; *Lag om kommunalt vårdnadsbidrag* nr. 2008:307).

In Sweden, national rules prescribes that a parent that decides to stay home full time to care for his/hers child has the right to take a leave of absence from work and this will not have influences on the so-called SGI, which is the base that previous work period and

amount of salaries have created for entitlements to social insurances. Similarly a period that a parent is receiving benefits for care does not affect the parent's possibility of unemployment insurances until the child reaches the age of three. The cash for care does not in itself provide entitlements for pension, but all parents of children under four year old do accumulate pension points while caring for their child regardless of their source of income (*Försäkringskassan, n.d.*).

In Sweden the full payment of cash for care benefits is 3.000 SEK (325 Euro) but if the child in question participates in public day care the payments are lower in accordance with time spent (*Lag om kommunalt vårdnadsbidrag, 2008:307*). Municipalities can pay less, but not more and the municipalities can also establish additional rules (Rantalaiho, 2009a). The benefit is not subject to tax (*Lag om kommunalt vårdnadsbidrag, 2008:307*).

Table 8. Sweden, Stockholm: Amount of the cash benefit for childcare, 2011

Hours spent in day care	Amount in SEK
0	3.000
up to 25 hours	1.500

Source: *Stockholms stad, n.d.*

In Stockholm the full benefit is paid for children that do not use day care services. If the child is part time in day care, max 25 hours pr. week the benefit is 1.500 SEK (165 Euro). If the parents have used their required number of days in parental leave they could possible apply for the cash for care for more than one child ([op. cit.](#)).

According to Statistics Sweden 96 municipalities had implemented cash for care schemes in 2009. In total 3.316 applications had been received from 2.964 parents. 88% of the applicants were granted benefits, and of these 90.8% were women. In October 2010 104 municipalities had enacted schemes on cash for care (*Statistiska centralbyrån, 2011a*). Statistics Sweden also reports that for the first half of the year 2010 1.1% of all children

under the age of two where cared for by parents that received cash for care and if only calculated for the municipalities that have such schemes the figure would be 2.1%. It was also reported that there were great differences between municipalities, from 13.4% to less than 1% (*Statistiska centralbyrån, 2011b*).

Conclusion: The Nordic Model of gender equality and support for parental care

As we have argued for in this paper, both the historical development and the institutional character of the parental leave, the father's quota and cash for care schemes are in the Nordic countries quite different.

Parties to the left as well as parties to the right have in the Nordic countries over time been able to meet in agreement about the sense in extending the parental leave period, ensuring that both parents can take care of their children and for a period equal to or reaching beyond the first year of the life of the child. Where we find some political disagreement has been especially over the issue of introducing a father's quota and thus whether the state should force one parent (the father) to be more active in parenting, but this disagreement has not always followed conventional wisdom: In the case of Denmark and Norway it is clear that there is a left/right division on the issue of individual rights of fathers, thus the political theory is quite relevant regarding the policies of promotion of gender equality in these two countries, assuming that especially left wing parties would support the equal sharing of paid labour and unpaid care between men and women. However, as we have seen in the paper, the father's quota has in fact been promoted and introduced in both Iceland and Sweden by parties right of the centre.

The pattern regarding the cash for care scheme is on the other hand very clear in regards to following a clear party political pattern: In all the countries the policy on cash grants for childcare has been enacted by right-wing governments (Brandt and Kvande, 2009; Cronholm, 2009; Hattja and Nyberg, 2006; Rostgaard, 2002; Eydal and Rostgaard, 2010a). Furthermore, in Iceland where cash for care is only implemented on local level, in the majority of cases it has been local governments right of the centre that have enacted such schemes (RBF, 2010). This is in line with the experience in other countries were

conservative and centre parties have been the primary advocates of cash for care schemes (e.g. Morgan and Zippel, 2003).

This prompts us in this paper to ask how policies of father's quota and cash for care with such different outcomes in regards to gender equality can be promoted in the same national context, and as we have seen in the case of Iceland and Sweden, also by parties to the right.

Perhaps part of the explanation is that while the introduction of the gender equality incentive of the father's quota is rooted in the institutional and cultural context of the Nordic welfare model, cash for care facilitates flexibility and choice and thus has apparent advantages even in a welfare model such as the Nordic. As Sipilä et al (2010b) note the introduction of cash for care in the Nordic countries can also be seen as a response to contemporary pressures in the labour market and as an expression of a new Nordic familism, i.e. a movement to emphasize the value of parental care.

Are the cash for care schemes then here to stay? Not necessarily so, judging from the take-up by parents. As we have accounted for, the cash for care scheme was quite popular in Norway, but there has been constant decline in take-up rates and at the same time the volumes of available preschool has been increased. The Swedish scheme from 2008 does not seem to be a popular option among Swedish parents nor for that matter the municipalities and the take up rates are very low. This applies also in the case of Denmark where take up rates among parents are very low indeed, but it can also be explained by the fact that the conditions that parents have to fulfil to qualify for the cash for care benefits are quite many. In the case of Iceland there has been no legislation and the municipalities that have enacted cash for care schemes have emphasised that the schemes are regarded to be a contemporary solution in the wait for a longer paid parental leave and increased day care volumes. Furthermore the biggest municipality has abolished its scheme due to cuttings in the aftermath of the economic crisis. The only country, where the cash for care scheme seems to thrive well is in Finland where the scheme has become an important part of the child-care arrangements for young children and the take up is higher in Finland than in any other Nordic country. As Rantalaaho (2010) notes this may very well be due to the timing and consolidation of the benefit in Finland, as it was introduced much earlier than

in the other Nordic countries and simultaneously with the introduction of the child's right to day care.

Criticism of the cash for care policy has also been and continues to be strong in both Norway, Iceland and Sweden, referring to the negative effect of cementing gender inequalities and on children's participation in day care (see e.g. Rantalaaho, 2010).

It may be too early to make any definite conclusions about the lifetime of cash for care schemes in the Nordic countries, but these latest figures on take up suggest that parents do prefer other care options. Thus, despite the fact that all the countries have established cash for care schemes it seems as if Finland has a special position among the Nordic countries in this respect, being the country with the oldest scheme and highest take up. This is also reflected in the relatively low volumes of day care for children under the age of 3- in comparison to the other Nordic countries.

Even though increasing informalisation has been suggested as a necessary aim for governments and the solution to the global challenges in the welfare state (Sipilä, Anttonen and Kröger, 2009), Nordic parents thus seem to prefer other care solutions – except for Finnish parents. While the introduction of the cash for care schemes in the Nordic countries may initially have represented a broader socio-political movement towards neo- or re-familisation (Lister et al. 2007; Mahon, 2002), the take-up of cash for care suggests that Nordic familism in at least four of the Nordic countries calls for public support for well compensated parental leave and high quality and subsidized services that facilitate gender equality rather than low paid cash for care schemes that encourages mainly mothers to stay at home.

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