

# Swedish parental leave and gender equality: Achievements and reform challenges in a European perspective <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

- Full report in pdf <sup>[2]</sup>

## Abstract:

This study sets out to discuss the Swedish parental leave system and identify achievements, policy dilemmas and reform alternatives in a European perspective. The structure of parental insurance legislation, with earnings-related benefits and a long leave period, is often seen as a main explanation why Sweden has been able to combine relatively high fertility levels with high female labour force participation rates and low child poverty. In the perspective of changing demographic structures in Europe, with declining fertility levels and a growing number of elderly, the strengthening of dual earner family policies, including parental insurance legislation, may mitigate macro economic and demographic problems by increasing gender equality and decreasing the work-family conflict. Despite the positive consequences, unresolved questions exist in the present parental leave legislation. The flexibility of the Swedish system, which still has extensive transferable leave rights, has the consequence that the lion's share of parental leave days is still taken by mothers, among other things making it difficult for women to compete on equal terms with men in the labour market. Consequently, the gender-based division of parental leave may contribute to a preservation of traditional gender roles and inequalities. Another problem in the Swedish system is the work requirement for eligibility that excludes students and others with weak labour market attachment from the earnings-related benefits, possibly inflicting on the postponement of parenthood. Raising the minimum benefit could be one solution to enable childbearing among persons with weak labour market attachment, but this would also affect the economic incentives for paid work, and thus weaken the dual earner model.

**Region:** Europe <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** gender <sup>[4]</sup>

legislation and regulation <sup>[5]</sup>

maternity and parental leave <sup>[6]</sup>

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