

Swedish dads swap work for child care duties ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

STOCKHOLM -- One of Henrik Holgersson's friends laughed in his face when he told him he was going to spend the better part of 2011 as a stay-at-home dad. But his employer, an event management company, and co-workers patted him on the back and wished him luck.

Holgersson took out 240 days of parental leave paid for by the government while his girlfriend went back to her job after eight months at home with their son Arvid, 1. "To take care of Arvid is a real fatherly thing to do. I think that's very masculine," said Holgersson, 34, of Stockholm.

His experience isn't unusual here because Sweden encourages dads to stay at home with their newborn through a parental leave policy that is one of the most generous in the world, even among the more than a dozen countries that offer paid paternity leave.

Despite austerity cuts across Europe, Sweden's parental leave benefits appear safe. The economy is in relatively good shape, the budget is balanced and the government would commit political suicide if it scaled back on a program embraced by Swedes across all income brackets.

Parents share 480 days of paid leave for each child. The benefits amount to 80 percent of the stay-at-home parent's salary for the first 390 days, but no more than 910 kronor, about \$135, a day. Thereafter the amount drops to 180 kronor, about \$30, a day for the remaining period.

Mothers are still taking more leave than fathers, but things are changing. In 2000, Swedish men took only 12.4 percent of the parental leave; by last year their share had risen to 23.1 percent, according to government data.

Foreigners often appreciate the program, too. "It's almost too good to be true," said Joel Sherwood, 35, an American living in Sweden who took more than six months off to stay home with his daughter. His friends back home were flabbergasted that his boss was OK with it and that the government would foot the bill.

-reprinted from the Associated Press

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