

NORWEGISCH-DEUTSCHE WILLY-BRANDT-STIFTUNG DEN NORSK-TYSKE WILLY BRANDT STIFTELSE

Gesprächskreis Nachhaltige Reformpolitik



„Aus der tiefen Krise in den Höhenflug –
Wie reformiert man in Skandinavien?“

Eine Veranstaltung der
NORWEGISCH-DEUTSCHEN WILLY-BRANDT-STIFTUNG
und der
DEUTSCH-NORDISCHEN PARLAMENTARIERGRUPPE
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Laila Dávøy: Gender Equality Brings More Children – Future With Job And Family

Vortrag

An important challenge in most of Europe today and in the near future is the falling birth rates. Today Europe is an ageing society. A decreasingly smaller proportion of young people will have to support an increasingly larger proportion of old people. Despite falling birth rates a recent survey on a Norwegian website for pregnant women found that four out of ten young women plan to have two children and three out of ten plans to have three children. Young women of today also invest heavily in education. In other words, young women's plans for the future include both work and family. When young couples stop having children that is an important signal to us.

A well-known scientist on family issues once said: "Norway is My Northern Star". By that she meant that the Norwegian family policy represent an important example for other western countries. I believe that our family policy is the result of a unique Norwegian cultural and historical setting. However, the basic objective of our policy; a deep and profound belief in a gender perspective integrated in the family policy, I believe will apply for other western countries as well.

I believe that in pursuing a sustainable family policy you have to integrate gender equality. It has been the Norwegian (government's) view for several decades that family policy and gender equality are closely connected. The objective is and has been to enable both women and men to participate in working life on an equal footing and to share work at home. Welfare society must be based

on equality between women and men, in the family and in working life, and on children's need for time with both their parents.

Our ideas for the family have developed from the idea of the male breadwinner model, to the idea of a dual breadwinner. It has been a long journey beginning in the 1880s with women's liberation movement and some social benefit legislation, through the last century with launching of child allowance, equal pay norms, parental leave schemes, father's quota, single provider's benefits, day care institutions, the Gender Equality Act and institutions, and to the last inventions, the cash benefit scheme and gender quotas.

Today the majority of mothers of small children work. About 76 percent of mothers with children aged 0-2 years and 82 percent of mothers with children aged 3-6 years were in the labour force in 2001. It has been more common to work full time, but still as many as 45 percent of mothers work part time in 2002.

More fathers take part in child care. Since 1977 fathers have had the possibility of sharing the parental leave period with the mother. Few fathers exercised this option and only 3 percent of the fathers took parental leave at the beginning of the 1990s. The introduction of the obligatory paternity quota in 1993 led to a steep increase in the number of fathers taking their four-week leave. In 2002, about 85 percent of the fathers entitled to the paternity quota made use of their right.



In Norway we have a relatively high fertility rate. In the early eighties Norway had a low birth rate, which caused some concern. Since the middle of the eighties the birth rate increased, supposedly due to, among other things, improved parental leave possibilities. Since the middle of the 1990s the birth rate in European terms has remained high and stable. In 2000 the fertility rate in Norway was 1.85. However, the figure for 2001 dropped to 1.78, and for 2002 it dropped further to 1.75. It still remains to see if this represents a new trend.

Today there is a web of arrangements, schemes and legal measures for families with small children. I will briefly describe those who are designed to reconcile family and work:

- The parental leave period is 42 weeks with full wage compensation or 52 weeks with eighty percent wage compensation
- Four weeks of the parental leave period are reserved for the father
- In addition to the year of paid leave, each parent is entitled to one year of leave without pay. This reform also has a clear gender equality profile. If the parents want to stay at home until the child is 3 years old, the father must take his share of the care.
- The rights to leave also include the right to work shorter hours for employees who are responsible for the care of young children. So called flexible hours, are very important to parents.
- Parents with children under the age of 12 years are each entitled to take ten days paid leave if their child is sick.
- To give the parents an opportunity to choose whether to stay at home the first three years of the child's life or to go to work and make use of one of the State-subsidised day-care centre places (appr. 66 % of the children 1-5 years of age are offered a place), the Cash Benefit Scheme was introduced in 1998 to complement and use in combination with, the day-care centres. To make the right to choose real, we are now building day-care centres to meet all the demands from the parents of small children (appr. 80 per cent of the children).

This task is today one of the most profiled political issues of the Cabinet, and also in the Parliament. The completion of the Day-care-sector, would also bring gender equality many, many steps forward.

The situation is, however, some ambiguous as persisting gender differences still exist. Our labour market is strongly gender segregated and on average women earn less than men, due to, among other things, working part-time: about 40 percent of women in the labour market work part-time. Only 1 out of 10 fathers take more than their four-week leave. Still mothers take the vast bulk of housework. So the vision of equal parenthood seems to be women's model. Women are well represented in politics, but there is a lack of women in power and decision making positions in private corporate sector, in Academia and in the Armed Forces.

How can we overcome persisting gender differences? I believe the experience with the father's quota has shown that gender neutral schemes are not enough. The father's quota is a good illustration of how legislation can guide behaviour. A White Paper submitted by the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs in April 2003 to the Parliament under the title "The obligations of family life and parenthood" outlines long-term goals for amendments to the parental benefit scheme where the emphasis is on fathers rights. The Parliament has agreed upon the expanding of the fathers quota, and also to focus on the role of men.

We have made use of the same instruments in order to strengthen women's position in the corporate sector. The Government wants to obtain a minimum of 40 percent representation of each sex in the boards of state owned companies and the boards of the public limited companies. This autumn a legal proposition on this passed the Parliament.

So, is gender equality a prerequisite for producing more children? I do not believe it is possible to give a definitive answer to the question. However, our experience with a gender integrated family policy and reviewing the history from 10 years back strongly suggests a positive connection.

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