



Policy briefing

Citizenship, flexibility and diversity in work-care relations, WP3

WP3 “Flexibility in Work and Care”:

The aim of the project is to support the current Danish policy debate concerning, on the one hand, how to establish more gender equality in the conditions for participation in both paid work, in caring activities in the household, and in different forms of social and political activities in the local community and, on the other hand, how to implement these equal conditions for women and men through diversity and flexibility in work-care relations and welfare policies generally.

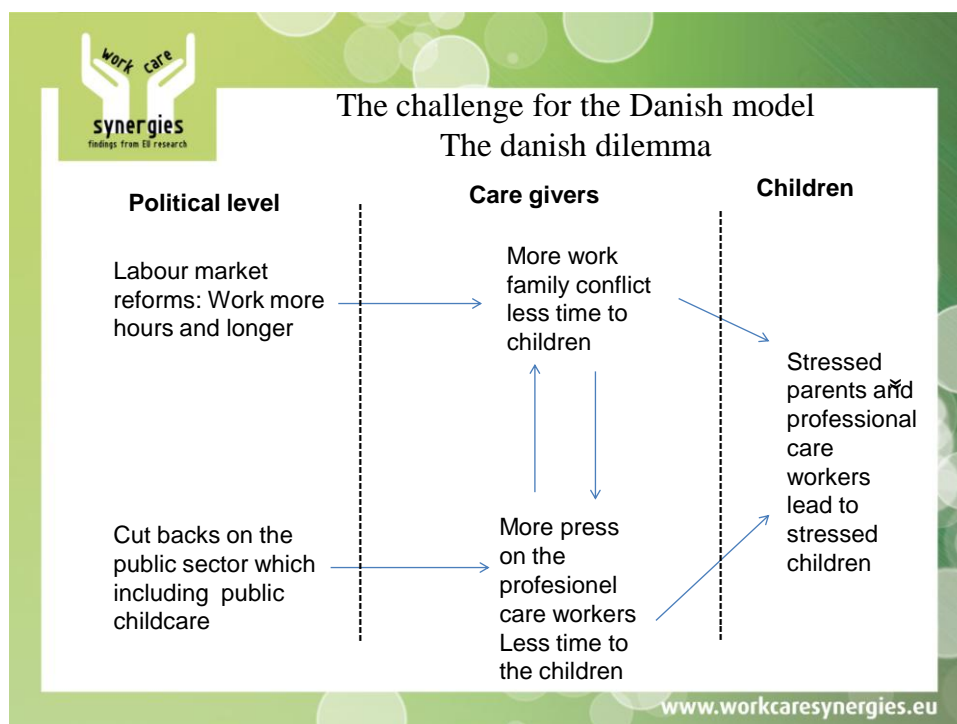
The Danish model of family policy is in a European context characterized as an extensive family policy model which combines comprehensive high quality childcare and well paid parental and maternity leave. This Danish model of family policy has some obvious advantages:

- It enables women to return to work after a one year’s leave with less negative career consequences
- The comprehensive childcare service in Denmark prevents women from taking up involuntarily part-time work in order to reconcile work and family. Most take up of part-time in Denmark is voluntary and for shorter periods characterized by a heavy care-load
- It reduce the gender-gap in men’s and women’s income over the life course
- High quality of daycare facilities with highly educated and professional care workers seem to equalize children’s life chances and strengthen the social cohesion of the society
- It enables women to combine motherhood with a continuous career on the labour market more easily compared to most other European countries
- It has positive effects on both the fertility rate which in Denmark is higher than in most other European countries
- It increases parents’ options of combining work and care responsibilities and make the work-family relations less constraint than we find in other European countries

However, the sustainability of the Danish model characterized by flexibility and diversity is declining due to lower income compensation in periods outside employment, longer working hours for both women and men, and cuts in personal in the public institutions providing care services for children.. In our discussion with political parties, trade union and researchers these concerns about the sustainability of the Danish model were discussed. In these discussions we have notices some trends in the Danish society

- Firstly, there has been a growing political demand for increase in the labour market supply by either the weekly working hours or by prolongation of the time for retirement – both demands are raised due to the ageing societies and the risk of labour shortage,

- Secondly, the local authorities have been forced to make severe budget cuts on the different types of services provides for children and other dependent citizens as a result of the financial crisis, and
- Thirdly there has been registered a lower flexibility in both the work – care relations and generally in the labour market relations due to growing unemployment and as a consequence of reduced generosity in social benefits and social service provision



These tendencies will challenge the Danish welfare and family policy.

An increase in the weekly working time or an increase in the retirement age will put more pressure on working parents, especially the mothers' ability to manage work and family responsibilities and increase the demand for affordable childcare facilities.

The cuts on childcare service provision will reduce the quality of the services in terms of staff-child ratio and opening hours. This will again make it make more difficult for the families to reconcile family and working life. The cut back on childcare service will also influence the professional care workers' working conditions and the time they can spend with the children.

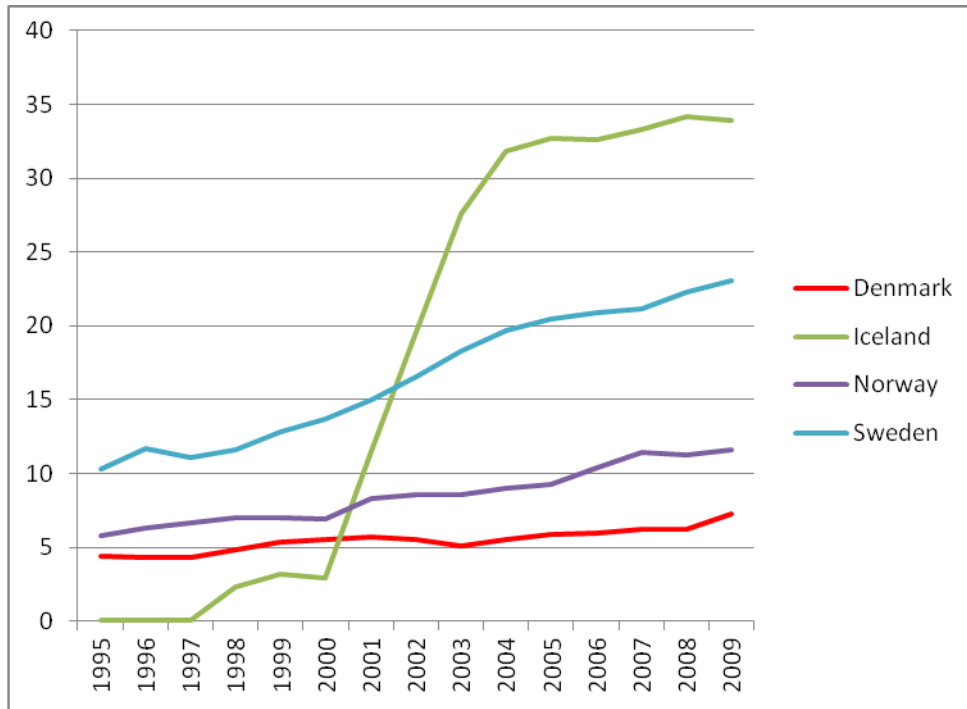
The budget cuts have negative consequences for the gender equality. It increases the burden of care obligations placed on women in the family and it reduce the status of professional care workers in the public sphere – which also are primarily women. In this respect women are double hurt by the financial crisis.

This development will in the end imply that children feel a double stress-strain. In the family the children will experience stressful parents who struggle with growing demands from the labour market while the children in the daycare situation will be confronted with stressful care workers due to deteriorated working conditions and less time for children. Especially for the most vulnerable children a declining quality of childcare service will have a negative impact on their future life possibilities.

Another crucial discussion in the Danish debate is how to develop more gender equal conditions for participating in caring activities. Despite the fact that Denmark has one of the highest labour market

participation rates among women, women are still the main providers of care work within the family. Several findings from European research show that general family policy has significant impact on women's involvement in paid work and caring activities but do not radically change fathers' involvement in paid work nor care, unless there is a specific legislation to support it. It is remarkable that Denmark is the only Nordic country that does not have a period of the total parental leave reserved for the father. This has clearly implications for fathers' take up of parental leave, which as shown in the figure is lower in Denmark than in any of the other Scandinavian countries.

Percentage of the total period of parental leave taken by the father



Source: The Nordic council

If we compare, the amount of the total parental leave taken up by the fathers we find very different patterns in the Nordic countries. This graph shows the development in men's leave as a proportion of the total leave taken in the family. Danish men only take 7% of the whole leave and this proportion has been more or less stable over time.

In 2001 a leave scheme was introduced in Iceland which reserved 3 months out of the total 9 months leave period to the father. This led to a dramatic increase in the leave take up among Icelandic fathers and today they take 33% of the total leave period. Danish fathers are lagging far behind the other Nordic countries when it comes to leave take up. This indicates that a change in the leave legislation might create rapid change in fathers' care pattern. In Denmark the newly elected government is considering a proposal reserving a 3 months period of the total parental leave for father.

Based on our empirical analysis and the discussion with Danish policy makers we suggest the following policy recommendations:

Policy recommendations

Labour market

- Better possibility to regulate working hours over the life course – e.g. the possibility to shift between part-time work and full-time work.

- Male dominated private employers must be encouraged by financial incentives to introduce family friendly policies and men and women ought to be supported in sharing the entitlement for parental leave more equally.

Leave provision

- More flexible parental leave, part-time leave, more options for postponing the take up of leave until children have reached the age of 8 (to take leave when the children change from crèche to pre-school, school etc)
- More days left for caring the children when they are sick
- A extended period of leave reserved specifically for the father

Childcare provision

- Extension of opening hours and elimination of closing days on normal weekdays - which again demand provision of more staff.
- Improved staff/child ratios in day care centers, especially when there is a high proportion of immigrant children
- Closer corporations between professional childcare workers, parents and other family members in providing the care service.



Thomas P. Boje
Professor, Ph.D., Department of society and Globalisation , Roskilde
Universitet. , Email: boje@ruc.dk



Anders Ejrnæs
Associate Professor Anders Ejrnæs, Ph. D. Department of Society and
Globalisation , Roskilde Universitet. Email: ejrnaes@ruc.dk