

Employment and work-family reconciliation policies in the Swedish paradigm

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Abstract. This article is based on a field work on the Nordic model, focusing on the Swedish paradigm, evaluating its various employment policies, placing municipalities as service providers, with the aim of also knowing the municipal participation in state labor market policy. In the same analysis, we highlight the focus on employment policies on work-life balance and family, which makes Sweden a unique country compared to other European countries.

Keywords: job; municipalism; conciliation; family; Welfare State.

Summary. 1. Introduction; 2. Methodology; 3. The municipalism role in employment policies; 4. The employment policies in Sweden; 5. Work-life balance policies in Sweden; 6. Conclusions. Bibliography.

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1. Introduction

Swedish labor policy is based on a dual approach, on one hand, in active measures like the labor market programs, and on the other, on passive help to unemployed -information of unemployment benefits or early retirement pensions-. The programs consist, fundamentally, in jobs to alleviate unemployment and to provide formation for the labor market and also, in determined selective measures oriented especially to the youth and people with disabilities.

The volume of the active employment measures made Sweden one of the foremost countries in Europe both in terms of expenditure and the number of participants in the programs of the labor market. On the other hand, parental leave is also a constant topic of discussion in Sweden's political agenda, approaching in this article the origin of the public policies about birth rate and conciliation, those who, for the first time, managed to scientifically discuss about birth rate and conciliation, and about single-parent families inside the social policies. Sweden is characterized by the consideration of the single-parent mother as a worker. In order to do this, it addresses both the institutional legacy in family policies and the handling of single-parenthood. This country has recorded in the last few decades an increase of single-parent families, but at the same time their participation in the labor market has also increased.

Finally, the current institutional programs, after doing a historical sweep, highlight the development of these family policies, for the sake of a greater equality between sexes and the acknowledgement of single-parenthood to ensure the exercise of their rights in parental leaves.

2. Methodology

This study is based on a content analysis from diverse academic and legislative documentation referred to the employment policies and work-family reconciliation developed in Sweden, which has one of the highest fecundity levels in Europe, with a fecundity rate of 1,85 children per woman in 2020, and a birth rate (number of births per a thousand habitants in a year) of 11,4% (in contrast to 1,31 children per woman and a birth rate of 7,94% in Spain)¹

3. The role of municipalism in employment policies

The municipal associations ("*Kommuner*") have a wide-range of expertise and they are active in numerous areas that contribute to the implementation of state policies in the labor market. The responsibilities of the *kommuner* include the basic parts of one person's life, like housing and elementary school and high school to ensure basic support, and to promote the municipal contribution to the labor market policies via ensuring new strategies to create a local business community. Recently, the Government ordered Sweden's Public Employment Service to prepare and analyze determined conditions for the overhaul of this organism, highlighting the role of municipal associations as providers of the employment service, facilitating the entry of people in the labor market. In order to do this, an effective communication between municipalities is guaranteed, based on the already existing structures while adapting these to the conditions of different municipalities (in accordance with local conditions and political priorities) including in their service both support to the individual job seekers and collaboration in strategic issues, procuring certain services under the Public Procurement Law.

The municipal initiatives also include job seeking activities and that the associations design aid policies to unemployed municipal residents for a subsidized or regular employment, leaving a relatively big space so the municipalities can participate as contractors of the State Public Employment Service. These powers are contained in the Local Government Law, and the additional special legislation which develops in practice what is determined by Law, varying the powers according to the effort or measure and where and when it is performed.

At the beginning of 2020, less than half of the *kommuner* had an employment service office, but their goal towards the end of 2020 is to ensure their presence throughout the country, making a difference

¹ Data extracted from the World Bank and the Coyuntural Index of Fecundity 2020

between matching efforts, which are the ones destined for people who are close to getting a job, and the equipment efforts, which are mainly aimed at people who are more distant from the labor market. Where most efforts are made at the municipal level is in the training of the unemployed, because municipalities are responsible for the education of their adults, highlighting that, from the total of public expenditure for the educational system accounts approximately a 7,5% of the GDP, which makes Sweden to be one of the countries with more investment in Education, while the European average is of a 5,8%.

The labor market formation has been taken in a private way since the late 80s. The private actors that collaborate with the labor market services have been a part of the Swedish labor market policy since 2007. External contractors currently represent an important part of the initiatives that the Swedish Public Employment Service offers to registered job seekers. In 2019, approximately 61.000 unemployed persons participated in employment services with independent actors contracted by the State Public Employment Service, and 46.000 unemployed people participated in acquired training and, from there, got their jobs.

In 1997, a special system of educational assistance was launched that allows unemployed people to follow a basic or secondary education for up to one year, while receiving a sum equivalent to the unemployment benefit or unemployment allowance.

As part of the active labor market governmental programs, professional formation is offered to unemployed people, or at risk of losing their jobs. The formation and recycling activities are organized through the National Agency for Training for Employment (AMU), which coordinates 100 training centers.

In addition to the Local Government Act, there are other regulations governing what municipalities and commonwealths can do and what's important for the labor market area. According to the Unemployment Board Act (Rundström, 2020: 30), the municipalities have the task of preventing unemployment in their own municipality and reducing its effects; also, in the areas of social services and education.

With the support of the Social Services Act, the municipalities have an obligation to promote the people's right to work. (Chapter 3, Section 2 of the Social Services Act).

The physical presence of the employment service throughout the country has been decreasing. During the period 2014- 2018, the Swedish Public Employment Service closed its local operations in 60 municipalities.

At the beginning of 2014, the Public Employment Service had offices in 278 of Sweden's 290 municipalities. Four years later, there were offices in 218 municipalities. In less than a third of these municipalities, there was an employment services office which was open every working day of the week. According to the Swedish Public Employment Service, the main reasons for the office closures over the years have been a change in working methods and digitalization.

Between January 2019 and January 2020, offices were closed in another 84 municipalities, and in January 2020, 134 of the country municipalities had an Employment office. According to the latest legislative agreements that the government wants to implement, Public Employment Service will have to guarantee assistance throughout the country but with a collaboration between networks of municipalities to make it work more efficiently, clearly outlining the division of responsibility. The proportion of unemployed people who are far from the labor market has increased and many of these unemployed people receive their support through financial assistance from the municipalities with the help of coordinated individual planning, contributing to a steady increase in long-term employment and positioning the municipality as a contractor on behalf of the Swedish Public Employment Service.

These Employment Service activities are intended to be of equivalent design for employers and jobseekers throughout the country, adapted to the conditions and needs in different parts of the country, with job placement programs, orientation, training, reinsertion and activities focused on young people with (carrying out commercial activities where people with disabilities have the opportunity for employment) by establishing an individual action plan with the job applicant, separating between the areas of social, educational, integration and business policy, and trying to effectively bring together those offering jobs with

those looking for work. Between them, there are three priority lists: the adult education of the municipalities, the community guidance for newly arrived immigrants, and the job orientation for young people under 20 years of age who have not started working and have not begun or completed an upper secondary education, with the aim of reducing youth unemployment.

As education plays an important role in labor market policy, the people that don't have secondary education are more difficult candidates for obtaining a job, and the women of this group have a particularly weak position in the labor market. In 2018, the unemployment rate between people without secondary education was slightly more than 20%, which can be compared with an unemployment rate of slightly less than 4 per cent between those with postsecondary education. Slightly more than one third of the unemployed who registered with the Swedish Public Employment Service in 2019 lacked upper secondary education. The number of unemployed persons who lack an equivalent to elementary school are also increasing. Equipping job seekers with the right skills is central to a well-functioning labor market policy. The importance of adult education in the provision of skills is clarified in the Education Act. The guides registered in education within the municipal education for adults is one way in which the Swedish Public Employment Service can help the unemployed participate in educational initiatives by separating adults at basic, secondary and higher education levels.

The early municipal initiative was based on municipal responsibility for care of the poor and the costs of emergency care for the poor. The first municipal employment services were established in 1902, and from 1907, the state provided subsidies for various activities on condition that the municipal employment offices would have a uniform method of work throughout the country. For about 40 years, the employment service was run by municipalities and *kommuner* (county councils; looking for its equivalent in Spain, municipality commonwealths). Under the leadership of the municipalities, the Employment plans have consisted principally in three tasks: job placement, unemployment control and statistics. It wasn't until 1940 when Sweden achieved a state organization for employment services, integrating the county's labor meetings (of the *kommuner*, active until 2008) with the objective of directing and coordinating the local offices, with the subsequent assumption of their competences by the Swedish Public Employment Service "*Arbetsförmedlingen*". A high share of municipal revenues for labor market measures are payments by the Swedish Public Employment Service to the municipalities.

In the labor market, the Swedish Public Employment Service replaces municipalities in paying unemployed people who participate in job training. Municipalities may also receive compensation for job searching and studying or vocational guidance activities for the unemployed within the Youth Employment Guarantee Schemes. In general, participants in municipal initiatives are larger recipients of financial assistance than those participating in the state Public Employment Service, and there is also a higher proportion of low-skilled people participating in municipal initiatives.

Labor market training has been carried out privately since the mid-1980s. The purpose of empowering external contractors was to promote flexibility in training initiatives and better resource management. On average, each office has 19 full-time employees working on labor market issues.

4. The employment policies in Sweden

The employment policy is based on the principle of activation, with a large percentage being allocated to labor market activation programs, almost 50% of the total expenditure on labor market policy. Since 1993, for-profit employment agencies have been allowed. However, it is prohibited to request fees from employees and they are only allowed to collect them from employers

The labor force participation of the Swedish women is elevated in comparison with the participation of the women in other EU member states: 78% compared to a European average of 57%, and approximately half of the Swedish labor force is made up of women. In Sweden, the women unemployment rate is lower than for men, as we will see later, which is noteworthy given that, in most European countries, unemployment rates for women are higher than for men.

Within employment strategies, it is worth mentioning the importance of Swedish trade union centers, with a high percentage of worker participation, which is estimated at around 90%. The three largest unions are the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), which brings together 21 trade union organizations and has more than 2 million members; the Swedish Confederation of Professional Workers (TCO) with almost 1.5 million members, and the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations (SACO), with nearly half a million members. Approximately, half of the labor force is formed by administrative personnel, while the biggest part of the LO Confederation members work outside of the industrial sector.

LO and TCO organizations are based on the industrial principle, according to which unions are organized according to the economic sector rather than according to employees' professional activity. Employers pay 0.3% of their total payroll to occupational safety councils, as an insurance policy against layoffs. When the economic situation is good, money accumulates; then, when there is a need to downsize, the boards are there to mitigate the blow, covering a personal advisor for those who may soon be laid off and thus help to be able to find a new job for the people affected. About 90% of laid off workers can find a job in a six months period. Also, entrepreneurs have a high level of organization. The most important organizations are the Swedish Employers' Confederation (SAF) for the private sector, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities, the Federation of County Councils and the Swedish Civil Servants' Agency (AgV). The main of these organizations is the SAF, which represents 42,000 private-sector companies with a total of 1.3 million employees (Forsäkringskassan, Europarl: 1994).

In Sweden, the collective agreements have traditionally played an essential role in the regulation of relations between employers and employees. The collective agreements cover any aspects of the employer-employee relationship, such as wages, working conditions, and conditions of employment. Even if legislation exists in a particular area, this does not prevent the conclusion of collective agreements, provided that such agreements guarantee a better position than the one provided for in the statutory provisions.

Usually, bargaining took place at the central level, with both parties negotiating on behalf of their respective affiliates. However, since 1983, under the Olof Palme government, negotiations in the private sector have been decentralized and have increasingly taken place at sector level. The Employers' Confederation (SAF) is openly opposed to negotiations on wage issues being conducted at central level.

The success of the unions' equal pay policy can be clearly seen in the small wage differentials in Sweden compared to those common in other OECD countries. While the wage differential between categories of workers within the industrial sector in the early 1980s was 34% in Sweden, in the United Kingdom it was as high as 210% and in the United States 490% (OECD, Economic Surveys - Sweden, 1994).

Thanks to the "peace compromise" between the employers' organizations and the trade unions, which dates back to the so-called Saltsjöbaden Agreement of 1938, few strikes are called in Sweden and few strike days are lost - the annual average is 100 per 1,000 employees between 1988 and 1992 - while the EEA annual average is 153.

With Sweden's accession to the EU in 1995, the Swedish government had previously ensured, through the European Commission, that the Social Protocol to the EU Treaty would not entail any change to the country's existing internal labor market practices and, more specifically, to its system of collective agreements between the social partners.

Swedish legislation doesn't provide for any kind of minimum wage, however, the minimum wage retributions are established in the collective agreements and since the 1991 economic crisis, the pensions system was modified so it could guarantee its sustainability, providing three types of pensions: 1) *garantipension*; for those who aren't able to reach the amounts that the State considers as the minimum for a living; 2) *konstpension*; individual capitalization system with employment pensions plans; 3) *Premiepension*; what makes up the individual pension system. The notional accounts are an indefinite benefit system, which operates like private pension plans, where all the contributions to the Social Security

during the entire working life, calculated in relation to the life expectancy at the time of retirement. This makes a contrast with the distribution system in Spain.

All labor market legislation in force in Sweden today dates back to the early 1970s, such as the laws on employee participation in decision making on issues related to working life, safety at work and the status of union representatives in the workplace.

According to the Annual Vacation Law, all employees are entitled to a minimum of 25 working days of vacation, that is, to five weeks of annual leave.

The Employment Security Law protects the workers against unfair dismissal, which makes the employer provide objective reasons for such dismissal. An objective reason, for example, is lack of working positions, which makes it possible to dispense with one or more persons. However, if the employee can be transferred to a different position within the same company, dismissal should not take place. Generally, dismissals are governed by the principle that the ones hired last are the first to be dismissed.

Employers are obliged to inform their employees about the development of the company's production, the state of its economy, and about the guidelines of the company's personnel policies. When an employer foresees significant changes in the company's activities or in the working conditions for one or more union members, he is obliged to consult with the employees before taking any decision. In private companies with at least 25 employees, the employees are entitled to representation on the (Försäkringskassan, Information on Social Security, 1994).

5. Work-life balance policies in Sweden

At the beginning of the 20th century, widows in Sweden received relief for poverty, while single mothers were confined to poorhouses or were forced to leave their children in orphanages (Madruga, 2006: 110). In a few years Sweden experienced a great social advance, standing out as one of the first countries to enact the legal measures for separated, unmarried and abandoned mothers at a time when the moral issues played an important role. Thus, in constant studies of public opinion, it can be seen that single-parent families were not rejected by Swedish society (Wennemo, 1984: 85).

When marital breakdown is analyzed from a historical point of view it should be noted that the Nordic system was less rigid than that of other European countries. In the 1920s, divorce included a wide variety of grounds including mutual consent and the breakdown of marital relations (Goode, 1993), with divorce being understood as the result of a series of personal and social problems rather than a crisis of individual morality.

Regarding joint custody after divorce, back then, the opposition of one of the parents was sufficient to deny joint custody. Today, however, in 80% of cases the parents continue to have this type of custody after divorce, but this does not always mean that a child lives partially with the father and partially with the mother; in nine out of ten cases, he lives with the mother².

In addition, Sweden, the State, has historically shown a pioneering character towards non-marital children. Since the beginning of the last century, an egalitarian individualism developed, through which equality between husband and wife was established. Scandinavian countries, with Sweden on the lead, were less patriarchal than other societies because they were Lutheran. But this does not imply Lutheranism was less patriarchal than other religions; it was just that, by this time, Lutheranism had become less orthodox, and that favored children and women. This equality extends on the recognition of rights between matrimonial and extramarital children³. Equal paternity rights were instituted, although initially not equal inheritance rights, until 1954⁴ and the same inheritance rights were extended to all children. By 1976 this distinction was definitively eliminated (Therborn, 1993:258-259) and more liberal attitudes towards the

² Swedish Institute, "Statistics and public opinion surveys", Swedish Institute material, available at <https://si.se/en/>, 2000 et seq.

³ 1915 Swedish Marriage Act

⁴ 1954 års lag om moderskapshjälp (1954 Maternity Assistance Act)

phenomenon of cohabitation were identified among Swedish cohabitation since the beginning of the 20th century⁵.

Concern about population decline in Sweden and the wellbeing of families with children during the first decades of the 20th Century had been circumscribed to conservative political circles, which feared the impact of the population decline in their labor force and their military power (Madruga, 2006). During the 1930s and 1940s, a heated debate occupied the Swedish political scene over the question of whether families with children should receive tax deductions or family benefits⁶. Both the conservatives and the agricultural parties were in favor of tax deductions, while the social-democrats and the liberals supported family benefits. Social-democrats led the discourse of reducing inequality between social classes as a way of providing protection for children.

The Myrdals' proposals differed from the conservative policies of countries such as France and Germany in which they combined two seemingly contradictory objectives: to promote the birth rate and birth control. Myrdal did not call for women to return to their traditional role as housewives; on the contrary, he emphasized making it easier for women to have children. According to Popenoe (Popenoe, 1988), the novelty introduced on the Swedish political scene is the consideration that the economic burden of child rearing and education should be shifted from the individual to society, speaking for the first time, of family as the main institution of society, far from the moral disquisitions raised by the Church, although this way of looking at the family was opposed to "anti-familialist" currents, which criticized the Victorian bourgeois family that had emerged in the 19th century and whose exponents we see in intellectuals who see family as an obstacle to personal development and to the freedom of the individual (a view defended by feminism) and on the other hand, in Marxists, who also see the family as a place of oppression. Against this, the merit of Alva Myrdal and other feminists was to introduce into the political debate the question of a working woman's right to marry and have a family (Gustafsson, 1995: 296)⁷.

As Swedish family policy evolved, it was able to merge with a class policy and a gender policy. The Welfare State Project developed from the 1960s onwards in Sweden assigned greater state responsibility for the care of children, the elderly, the sick and the disabled (Popenoe, 1988: 124). The idea is not to maximize dependency on the family, but rather individual capabilities to achieve independence (Esping-Anne, 1988: 124). In the Swedish case, the satisfaction of the needs for care and personal services have been shared between families and the welfare state. It should not be forgotten that before the development of the Welfare State, most of these services were provided by women within the family and that the Swedish family has set for itself the ideal that men and women should be able to work to support themselves.

Economic relations between spouses are regulated by the Marriage Code of 1987, which, among other things, states that there is no right to a compensatory pension after a separation. For children it is different and is regulated in the Parental Code (Björnberg and Björk, 1995). It also contains amendments to the Inheritance Code, aimed at strengthening the position of the economically weaker spouse in the event of divorce or death of the other spouse. Responsibility for socialization of children is shared by parents and the public sector (Björnk, 1995). The state guarantees the right to be a parent and, at the same time, controls the way in which this right is realized.

In regard to the indicator of the number of divorces, the same tendency towards increase can be seen. During the 1950s 1,18 divorces occurred for every 1000 inhabitants (Goode, 1993: 84). During the 1960s this number of divorces went up to 1.2 for every 1000 inhabitants⁸. Although during the 1960s Sweden had an average level of marital breakdowns it was after the simplification of the divorce law in 1973-1974 when

⁵ At present, the economic relations of cohabitants are regulated at the Joint Home Act)

⁶ Betänkande angående moderskapspenning och mödrahjälp avgivet av Befolkningsskommissionen (Report on Maternal Stress and Maternity Assistance provided by the Population Commission in 1936).

⁷ She's also considered the pioneer on introducing the importance of the inclusion of sexual education in the political debate

⁸ Eurostat database (1995 & ss.) Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

changes accelerated and the number of single-parent families increased. The main factor explains the rise in the rate of divorces during the 1961-1983 period was the liberalization of the divorce Law (Castlesy and Flood, 1994: 24), a trend that has continued to increase thereafter, although the profile of the families has been changing over the years, with widows⁹ losing relevance over time in favor of divorcees and single mothers. (Hoem and Hoem, 1992: 281). Thus, a high labor force participation of women over 45 years of age points to a latent need for parental leave benefits or childcare services, as these women are unable to take care of their children. Also, political bets were placed on a convergence in male and female employment participation rates. While in 1983, female participation was 80.6% compared to 90.2% for men, in 1991 women's labor participation rose to 84.9% compared to 90.1% for men (Hoem and Hoem, 1992: 281). And in 1998 74% of women between 20 and 64 years old had a paid job, in comparison with 79% of men. It will be in the 1980s when the family obligations won't suppose any differences in the labor participation of women. Thus, in 1982 83,7% of women participated in the labor market, 83,5% of married women and 80,6% of mothers with children under seven years of age (Gustafsson y Jacobsson, 1985: 259).

In the housing of the 1950s, employment and constant benefits programs, such as maternity leave, primary child health care services and other family benefits were institutionalized. In this decade, divorce became a private matter, and in 1974 the divorce rupture was established. According to it, if both parties agree and there aren't children under 16 years of age, there's an automatic recognition of their right to divorce; if not, the law establishes a reflection period of 6 months.

With respect to the advance of alimony, already with the 1964 Act, a minimum amount was established instead of individual agreements negotiated in court, guaranteeing all children a minimum amount of subsistence. Not only was basic financial security provided for children with an absent parent, but also part of the parent's collection responsibility was transferred for custody in the State (Garfinkel and Sörensen, 1982: 513).

The 1960s and 1970s are, according to some authors, expansion phase for social services in Sweden (Olsson, 1993: 16)¹⁰. The 1960s saw the most interesting debates in regards to family policy¹¹. Also, these two decades are the most important in the development and implementation of the single-parent family policies package¹². The public commitment to the principle of gender equality and the importance given to economic activity as a way of achieving the former have been key elements in the history of women's participation in the labor market. This is highlighted, among other researchers, by Britta Hoem and Jan Hoem (1993). The 1960s saw the expansion of public nursery school services (Sundström, 1991).

The "Erlander Report", which takes its name from the Swedish social-democrat Prime Minister¹³, is published in 1964 and it implies that, for the first time in history, the social-democrat party will defend a comprehensive vision of each individual's situation, including his or her status as a member of a family, respect for their individuality and gender equality as an important part of their aspirations to achieve equality among all citizens. In this period, a public discussion about gender roles in Swedish society was triggered. This debate permeated family, education and market policy (Liljeström, 1978). The central element of this debate revolved around the role of social policy as a promoter of certain family structures. The Erlander Report had a major influence on legislative development of the early 1970s. One of the main recommendations was converting the maternity leave system into a parental leave system. This substitution implied much more than a simple semantic variation, by studying the necessary hours devoted to work before the birth of a child, the incentives for employment and the level of benefits (Nisman, 1992:

⁹ Since 1990, in Sweden a widow's pension does not exist. It was justified as a way for women not to depend on marriage but to be active in the labor market in order to fit in society

¹⁰ Stöd åt barnaföderskor: betänkande 1 avgivet av Socialpolitiskakommittén (Natality support: Report 1 presented by the Social Policy Committee)

¹¹ "Ökat stöd till barnfamiljer"; promemoria avgiven av Familjeberedningen ("Increased Support for Families with Children"; memorandum given by the Family Advisory Council in 1964)

¹² Familjestöd: betänkande avgivet av Familjepolitiska Kommittén (Family Support: Report submitted by the Committee on Family Policy in 1972))

¹³ Tage Erlander is the longest-serving head of government in a democracy, from 1946 to 1969 (23 years).

95). In this sense, if the mother was studying and had no income, she lost the opportunity to share this leave with the father unless she could find a job after the birth of the child. It was also important to have a job before the birth of a second child by increasing the replacement rate.

In 1974, a benefit replacement rate of 90% of the salary was established and the novelty of sharing the permit with the father was introduced¹⁴. An extension of maternity leaves to men was considered to be a way to symbolize gender equality, giving men opportunities to acquire greater responsibility for childcare (Haas, 1992: 401). But not only parental leave, but also paternity leave as well as a leave to take care of sick children allowed parents to share them, with a 1974 law that granted men the leave within the first month following the birth of a child and allowed the mother to share 10 days of leave to care for a child when they were ill (Madruga, 2006: 132). At the same time, since 1974, the parental leave could be used part-time until the child was eight years old (Sundström, 1991: 140).

The childcare policy formulation has concerned both the central government and the local authorities. While the central government has been in charge of establishing the objectives of this policy, the local authorities have been in charge of putting it into practice. In 1975, a preschool law obliged local authorities to provide vacancies to all children under six years of age. According to Ruggie (Ruggie, 1984) the sequence in the intervention in the area of childcare services has been determined, firstly, by the increase of the participation of women in the labor market; secondly, by the recommendations of the governmental commissions and finally, by specific social needs, depending on the number of hours that parents worked and the income they had. The discourse on the decline of traditional family has hardly been echoed in Swedish society, unlike other societies such as the British or American ones where it has been associated with high rates of dependency of single-parent families on welfare benefits (Hobson and Takahashi, 1997: 145).

In 1978 both parents won the right to an unpaid leave until their children were 18 months old, as well as the right to reduce the working day to six hours (Madruga, 2006). In 1980, the pregnancy allowance was introduced for pregnant women who, depending on the nature of the job, could refrain from continuing to work during the last two months of pregnancy without having to justify illness. In this way, any possibility of stress in pregnancy was eliminated, in addition to guaranteeing non-discrimination of women and regular time off before the birth of the baby. In the early 1980s, the redistributionist ideas of *keynesianism* in the European social-democrat parties started to lose strength in favor of new economic efficiency terms. Getting a balanced budget and less state intervention were seen as essential prerequisites for achieving the desired economic efficiency. In 1982, the Social-Democrats introduced changes to sick leave for sick children. On the one hand, they increased to 60 the days of the leave, and on the other, they extended this benefit to all families with children under twelve years of age (Sundström and Stafford, 1992: 202). In 1988, parents got three more months of parental leave, increasing to twelve the paid months, at the same level of compensation as sickness: in most cases, at 90% of income and with a minimum additional payment in the following three months. This way, three more months of paid parental leave were achieved. Employment security was guaranteed for an eighteen months period. According to this legislation, parents can use the parental leave until the child is eight years old.

The higher the woman's salary, the more likely the father is to take parental leave (Nisman, 1992). In March 1991, faced with high rates of absenteeism, the government decided to lower the rate of substitution of parental leave from 90 to 70% for the first few days to care for sick children, and as a result of this change, the rate of absenteeism decreased (Gustafsson, 1994: 304). On the other hand, it seems that employers were in favor of this type of leave and did not see any problem in taking full-time sick leave; only a few of them, in small companies, expressed problems with this type of leave. As Dr. Madruga observes, in her book "Single-parentality and Family Policy" (2006) there are certain authors who consider that one of the reasons of the electoral success of the social-democrats was the public perception of economic efficiency and social welfare (Stephens, 1996: 45). What is certain is that they have shown strong and widespread support for social policies and the welfare state. In 1986, child care services had the majority

¹⁴ Thus we see that it was in 1974 that parental insurance was introduced. For the first time, both parents were entitled to financial compensation for being at home with their children.

support and welfare benefits were much less popular. This mass support is a consequence of the universal nature of the policies.

In the middle of a strong economic crisis, in 1991 a coalition opposed to the Social-Democrat Party won the elections. One of their main proposals consisted in taking resources away from the system of preschool services to allocate these resources to families with children under the age of three in the form of care benefits. A law was approved whereby women could choose between a small allowance or municipal childcare services. In 1994, when Social Democrats regained power, arguing that care allowance was not in solidarity with working mothers, they succeeded in having it abolished (Hobson and Takahashi, 1997: 128). In the quest for a more equal parental insurance the so-called "parent's month"¹⁵ was introduced in 1995, guaranteeing that mother and father have an assigned month that cannot be transferred¹⁶. In 2002, this time was extended to two months.

With the new century and millennium, we've been facing an increasingly globalized economy. Since the early 2000s, parents in Sweden are granted, after the birth of their child, a medical leave with financial benefit for a total of 450 days of which 420 can be divided between the parents as they wish. However, the remaining 30 days called "the parent's month" can't be transferred. Parents living alone are allowed to obtain the full amount of this leave. The level of remuneration is 80% of gross income for 360 days. For the remaining 90 days a fixed daily amount of SEK 60 (around 6€) is paid. The benefits can be used in a variety of ways: staying at home full time or working part time for a longer period of time. Parents who are not employed in paid jobs prior to the birth of a child receive a fixed daily amount for 450 days. In addition to these benefits, upon the birth of a child, the father is entitled to ten days of paternity leave. Either parent may also obtain a leave to care for a sick child with compensation for loss of income (60 days per year per child). And to make it easier to reconcile work and family life, those with children under the age of eight years are also entitled to reduce their working day by two hours with a corresponding reduction in salary.

During the 2000s, the policy had been focused on childcare and families with children: a maximum rate was fixed, a cap, on how much a family must pay for care and also a blocking rule, so that the family will pay a maximum of 3% of its income on child care for the first child and the guarantee level of parental insurance was increased from SEK 120 per day in 2002 (approx. €11) to SEK 150 in 2003 (approx. €14) and to SEK 180 from 2004 (approx. €140). The number of parental benefit days has increased from 240 days in the 1970s to 480 days today. Parental benefit provisions are found in Chapter 4 of the General Insurance Act¹⁷. If the parents have joint custody of the child, both are entitled to half of the total number of parental benefit days, but one of the parents may transfer the right to parental allowance to the other parent.

In Sweden's efforts to achieve gender equality, each parent is entitled to 240 of the 480 days of paid parental leave. Each parent has 90 days reserved exclusively for him or her. Today, the men of Sweden take almost 30 percent of all paid parental leaves, a number that in terms of public policies is shown to be insufficient. When calculating, among other things, this parental benefit the SGI is used, which determines the substitution rate. SGI means "qualified income for sickness benefits". It is an amount calculated by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, which is the basis for how much money a citizen can receive if he or she falls ill or applies for parental leave, and it is calculated on the basis of an estimated annual earned income. There are situations where a person who is not working must maintain their income based on sickness benefits and this SGI applies, for example, to unemployment, as long as they are registered and are actively looking for a job through the Employment Service. The parental benefit is protected during the first two years of the child's life and it is unaffected if its qualified income is reduced. This means that, even if qualified income is lower (for example, their working hours are reduced), they will receive the same amount of parental benefit as before if they take the parental leave again before the child turns two years of age. The same applies in the case of a new pregnancy before the oldest child is one year and nine months old; they will receive the parental benefit calculated using the same qualified income as before it was reduced.

¹⁵ Föräldraledighetslagen (Parental Leave Act of 1995).

¹⁶ Here we see that it is in 1995 that one month of parental insurance was reserved for each parent. In 2002 a second month was reserved for each parent. In 2016 a third month was reserved for each parent.

¹⁷ Lagen om allmän försäkring, AFL (The General Insurance Act, 1962).

Despite the great progress made in Sweden which has always been at the forefront in terms of work-life balance and gender equality, the latest data collected annually by the Swedish Social Security Agency shows that there is still a gender gap among those who benefit most from the parental allowance. This is supported by the following data: men withdrew 29 percent of their parental allowance (and incorporated earlier to the labor life) and women withdrew 71 percent¹⁸.

6. Conclusions

This article describes and analyzes the various employment policies that have followed one after the other until the municipal associations and municipalities became providers of employment services. We have valorated the novelty of the labor security councils and the strong role of the syndicates in this country, analyzing which sectors are the priorities in terms of the employment strategies set by the Public Employment Service. We see that labor market policy, which is based on the "employment principle", differs from many other governments within the EU.

On the other hand, we have seen policies that have served to support the reconciliation of work and family life in Sweden, highlighting the figure of Alva Myrdal and the political commitment in the family policy, focusing her work on feminism and the guarantee of the Welfare State.

After that, progress has been made up to the current situation of recognition and enjoyment of the parental permit, and also other issues such as single-parenthood and the right to alimony, among others, drawing differences with other societies mentioned above.

Single-parenthood has been increasingly supported through various legislative reforms that we have been analyzing, valuing single-parent families as family structures where a father or a mother must take care of minor children, taking into consideration special situations of vulnerability and in which diverse data keeps showing gender gaps. Aid to single-parent families has as a goal to give the possibility of creating a satisfactory family situation even in the absence of one of the two members of the couple and they also grant entitlements to the cohabiting partner, even if there is no legal recognition as a spouse. Single-parenthood constitutes a family structure where the traditional sexual division of labor on which the Welfare State was built after the Second World War is no longer possible. Analyzing the most important support policies in recent decades, the advances in the institutionalization of children's education, their right to care, and the guarantees for the active participation of women in the workplace without their labor rights, whether or not they are married, pregnant or mothers, are highlighted.

Everything confirms Sweden and its policies as one of the pioneer countries in the political fight for conciliation, against gender discrimination, for an inclusive productive economy, for a low percentage of unemployment in comparison with neighboring countries and with other members of the OECD and making a firm commitment to measures to promote natality and the child rights protection.

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¹⁸ Data from Swedish Social Security Agency that can be consulted online in <https://www.forsakringskassan.se/>

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