

FATHERHOOD, GENDER EQUALITY AND CARE PRACTICES IN ITALY AND DENMARK

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Abstract: A growing scientific literature suggests changes in fatherhood. However, the extent to which this indicates a shift away from male breadwinner model is under debate across Europe. Thus, it is interesting to reflect on how paternal practices and gender models are evolving. This contribution will address the debate about fatherhood and gender roles by comparing two countries, Italy and Denmark, marked by relevant differences in terms of policies and practices related to fatherhood and childcare. Yet both countries are still facing the work and family balance issue. The question addressed in the chapter, by reviewing policies and secondary data analysis, will be: How are current political agendas and welfare services aimed at changing care patterns and gender equality in family life, and how are these policies and provisions transforming fatherhood and fathering practices? How are these new practices challenging and challenged by traditional gender norms and practices? Which trends can be identified?

Keywords: Fatherhood, Gender equity, Policies, Italy, Denmark.

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I - INTRODUCTION

Much research indicates that fathers are more involved and present in everyday family life and childcare than before. However, the extent to which this represents a genuine shift away from the male breadwinner model is under debate across Europe (Dermott - Miller 2015; Craig - Mullan 2010).

This contribution¹ will address this debate by comparing current changes in Italy with experiences from a Nordic Welfare State, namely Denmark. We'll focus on Italy

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¹ Paragraph II is attributed to M.L. Bosoni and III to A. Westerling; introduction, discussion and conclusion have been done jointly by authors.

and Denmark as the Nordic welfare regimes are often looked at as models for care practices which promote gender equality and shared care practices and thus constitutes a relevant backdrop for comparison for the current trends in Italy (Esping-Andersen 2016; Melby - Ravn - Wetterberg 2009; Lister 2009). However, we shall not argue that the Nordic model should be a blueprint for Italy, rather we shall discuss the developments and challenges in both countries.

Fatherhood and fathering practices are related to a variety of social aspects ranging from family and intimate life to policies, employment and negotiation of gender roles. The conduct of fathers does not strictly depend on the availability of leaves or employment rates, thus countries with similar leave schemes could produce very different paternity models. Paternal practices are influenced also by gender orientation and ideas. A complex mix of elements (policies, labor market, childcare services, parents' choices and practices and cultural ideas) coexist in shaping diversity in countries.

In fact, different approaches to welfare state in cross-national comparison consider an interplay of level/elements behind and between the state, the family and the market in shaping people agency (Jo 2011; Brandth - Halrynjo - Kvande 2017). The role of culture is particularly helpful in illuminating welfare regime differences, though it has been marginalized for long (Pfau-Effinger 2005). Culture is a powerful concept in welfare analysis concerning issues such as care practices and caring responsibilities.

Welfare state policies are based on specific ideas about social services and the ways they should be provided by the state, the family and/or the market and they differ regarding to how much importance is attributed to the family in the different aspect of everyday family life (Pfau-Effinger - Geissler 2005; Pfau-Effinger 2014).

In the light of these considerations, the questions addressed in the chapter, by reviewing policies changes and secondary data analysis, will be how are current political agendas and welfare services aimed at changing care patterns and gender equality in family life, and how are these policies and provisions transforming fatherhood and fathering practices? How are these new practices challenging and challenged by traditional gender norms and practices? Which trends can be identified?

Firstly, an overview of leave policies, childcare services and fatherhood practices in Italy will be discussed. The case of Denmark will be presented next and finally we will unfold a critical discussion of the interplay between policies, services and gender dynamics affecting contemporary fatherhood by comparing Italy and Denmark.

II - FATHERHOOD IN ITALY

Several studies (Magaraggia 2013; Bosoni 2014; Ruspini - Tanturri 2017; Bosoni - Crespi - Ruspini 2016) show that the importance of fathers in the family domain is now widely acknowledged, also in Italy. Balancing work and family is no more considered a mainly female responsibility. Policies also have contributed to this transformation.

Escobedo and Wall (2015) described the Italian model as a *short leave modified male-breadwinner model*, where breadwinning pattern is still strong and female/maternal employment rates are below EU averages (Wall - Escobedo 2013).

Relevant changes in leaves policies have been made to promote gender equality, however with a questionable effectiveness. In 2000 parental leave was introduced as individual right for mothers and fathers up to children's age of 8, paid at 30% of the actual salary, in order to support fathers' participation in care work².

In 2013 one day of compulsory paternity leave paid at 100% of the actual salary (with the option of two additional days) for employed fathers³ was introduced. Though relatively short it contributed to promote and legitimize paternal care.

Currently, the leave system consists of:

- 5 months of compulsory maternity leave, paid at 80% of the salary, for all the working mothers (at least 1 month before the birth);
- 2 day of compulsory fully-paid paternity leave and 2 days optional (starting from 2017), in 2018 days of leave for fathers should be 5 in total (4 compulsory and 1 optional).
- 6 months per parent of parental leave, as individual non-transferable entitlement.

The maximum total length per family is 10 months unless the father takes at least 3 months of leave in which case the total length is extended to 11 months and the father can extend his leave to 7 months. This is available for all the employees – including self-employed – on a full-time or part-time basis, according to contracts, until the child is 12 years old (previously until 8 years). Before 2015 parental leave was paid at 30% for the months taken until the child turned three years, and after that the leave was unpaid; starting from 2015 the age limit for paid parental leave was extended to six years after which age it was unpaid.

Moreover, cash benefits are available for an early return to the job for mothers or as an alternative to parental leave:

- 800€ bonus for childbirth, given by the National Institute of Social Security (INPS) to women at the end of seventh month of pregnancy, unrelated to the income, aimed at supporting costs related to motherhood;
- baby bonus, for low-income families, of 80€ per month for three years (960€ per year) for childbirth or adoption;
- voucher for nurseries, 1000€ per year, unrelated to the income level, for the first three years of the child as alternative to the parental leave for both employed and self-employed mothers; or a baby-sitting voucher, 600€ monthly for six months, for mothers returning to work after the five months of compulsory maternity leave.

The maximum post-natal leave period (including maternity and parental leave) available in Italy is 14-17 months (depending on bonus months if the father takes paren-

² At that time, fathers were not entitled to paternity leave, except for specific events (fathers sole-custody, severe illness or death of the mother).

³ In 2015 paternity leave was extended also to self-employed.

tal leave) but there are only around four months of well-paid leave entitlement (maternity leave paid at 80%, some contracts provide 100% remuneration). The remaining months are paid at 30% (average income in Italy is 1500 EUR), higher remuneration is sometimes provided according to sectors/contracts (Koslowshi - Blum - Moss 2017).

While these policies were aimed at supporting female employment which is currently under EU average (Italy: 48.3; EU28: 61.4), the possibility to change parental leave for cash benefit raises some concerns in terms of gender equity: the focus on women could lead to the reproduction of the unequal division of care responsibilities within Italian families rather than care-sharing (Cardinali 2013). Moreover, the implicit assumption is that mothers are the primary childcare, while fathers playing a secondary role.

Thus, the Italian case raises wider questions about the design of parental leave policies, their impact on parenting practices and the gendering of care. The current legislation reflects a significant cultural shift in the Italian context: from the sharing of parenting and enhancement of the family as main care actor, to a focus on early return to work and enhancement of caregiver external to the family (services/baby-sitting) as well as kinship network.

Moreover, leave policies must to be understood in relations to childcare services. In Italy, there is not a real entitlement to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and provision is currently not meeting EU standards according to Barcelona target⁴ (European Commission 2013), although data varies from region to region. In 2015 23% of all children under three years attended formal care services. The share was 91% for the group of children between three years and compulsory school age⁵ (Eurostat 2015 online database).

The rates, in Italy, show that parental reconciliation strategies are oriented towards childcare services when children are over three years, while with small children others type of care such as informal care by family network are prioritized as well as a female use of parental leave.

2.1. *The changing role of fathers?*

In terms of family practices, despite growing emphasis on involving fathers in Italy, gender differences still shape work and caregiving in Italian families: employment rate for people between 20 and 64 years is 51.6% for women and 71.7% for men, part-time employment rate increases the gap between men (8.1%) and women (32.7%). This means that part time is a typically womens'/mothers' reconciliation strategy (Eurostat 2016). Data from a quantitative study on Italian families, the «Multipurpose survey on households: aspects of daily life», carried out by the Italian National Institute of

⁴ The availability of high quality and affordable childcare for children from birth to compulsory school age is a priority for the European Union; thus in 2002 the Barcelona European Council set objectives in this area: at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% under 3 years of age should be attend formal childcare (European Commission 2013).

⁵ Data refer to children cared in formal arrangements from 1 to 29 hours weekly and 30 or more hours weekly.

Statistics (Istat) in 2012 with national a representative sample of 3745 families with 0-13 years old children, highlight interesting differences between mothers and fathers in care and work patterns: 18.1% of mothers vs. 5.8% of fathers in the sample reported a reduction of working hours because of family care needs, 8.6% of mothers against 1.3% of fathers stopped work due to the same reason (elaboration on Istat data 2012).

Looking at the amount of time dedicated to work and domestic activities the gender gap is evident: 53.4% of mothers vs. 4% of fathers takes 29 or more hours per week of domestic work and 32.2% of fathers vs. 5.6% of mothers does 41 or more working hours per week (elaboration on Istat data 2012). It must be noted that geographical variations influence fathers' involvement: it's higher in the North and Center than in the South (Ruspini - Tanturri 2017).

Further elaborations with cluster analysis on Istat 2012 data allows us to see the differences between mothers and fathers in the same family (Bosoni - Ruspini - Crespi 2016).

In *dual earner couples*, with both partners employed, which are the majority in Italy (43.2% of the sample) while mothers tend to work full-time or part-time, fathers usually work for extended hours (over 41) and a gap in domestic activities is evident (fathers do from 1 to 14 hours per week domestic work, mothers 15-28 hours per week). In families where *only the father is employed* (breadwinner model) (34.2%) fathers take no hours of domestic work, used no parental leave or other reconciliation measures, and prioritize job for economic reasons. The same situation is also present in families with *non-working fathers* (11.0%) where fathers do not help at home (zero hours of domestic work, in contrast with over 29 hours of their partners).

These data confirm the persistence of male breadwinning as a cultural element, in fact non-working fathers are not involved and domestic work is made mainly by women.

On the other hand, a qualitative research (Bosoni 2014) with working fathers⁶ suggests that fathers consider themselves more involved in family life, in particular if compared with their own fathers, they consider the parental task as applying to both mothers and fathers equally, childcare and domestic activities are shared between parents as well as work. However, the same study also suggest that the division of paid work and domestic activities appear influenced by the couple's work patterns: when the mother is unemployed or working part-time, the male breadwinner model is reinforced; paternal engagement in childrearing is mediated by the mother and her job. This shows that the conduct of mothers and fathers are mutually and relationally influenced (Bosoni 2014).

Despite policies aimed at promoting father involvement and gender equality the data on gendered division of tasks, in particular between domestic and paid work, or leave taking, shows that the ideal of the mother as primary caregiver is maintained.

⁶ The study done in Italy in 2011 was aimed at studying experiences of fathers employed in 3 family friendly companies, with both managers and employees interviewed, for a total of 45 interviews.

III - FATHERHOOD IN DENMARK

The Nordic welfare state model has been dubbed «women friendly» (Hemes 1987) as it provides extensive and generous maternity leave schemes and promotes a high degree of female labor market participation and level of education. Extensive and high quality day care is part and parcel of these policies.

The Danish version of the Nordic Welfare Regime has been identified as a «One-Year-Leave' Gender-Equality-Orientated Model» (Wall - Escobedo 2013) along with Iceland and Sweden, whereas the other Nordic Welfare States, Finland and Norway, are labelled «Parent-choice-oriented» policy models. A part of the reason for this differentiation is the complementary relationship between leave arrangements and child-care services in Finland and Norway, which is not prevalent to the same extent in Denmark, Sweden and Iceland.

Currently, the Danish leave system consists of:

- 18 weeks of maternity leave, out of which the 4 weeks must be taken prior to birth.
- Two weeks of paternity leave which must be taken in one block within the first 14 weeks of childbirth.
- 32 weeks of parental leave which may be shared between the parents. These 32 weeks can be prolonged up to 46 weeks for persons employed (including the self-employed). It is also possible to use the parental leave as part time leave and return to work on part time during a 64-week period. However, this is subject to agreement with the employer.

All employees and self-employed persons are entitled to cash benefit during the leave. If fully employed this amount equals 560€ per week during all the weeks of maternity, paternity and parental leave. However, the total amount of cash benefit cannot exceed 52 weeks of cash benefit (app. 29,000€). If the leave period is prolonged the cash benefit is not extended, which means that the cash benefit per week is lower. Employees covered by collective agreements (75 percent of the Danish Work force) will however receive full pay for 29 weeks in which cases the employer tops of the cash benefit. Depending on the industry some employees receive full salary during 50 weeks of leave. In most cases the employer is reimbursed via funds.

In contrast to Norway, Sweden and Iceland, Denmark does not reserve a part of the parental leave for fathers by law. Under some collective agreements, a father quota has been introduced. This will be elaborated below. Danish legislation stipulates that the 32 weeks of parental leave are available regardless of who of the parents take it. This means that mothers take up the majority of the parental leave days in practice (Nordic Statistics A) which is no surprise since research has shown that leave which is not reserved for the father generally is viewed as belonging to the mother (Rostgaard - Lausten 2016; Jacobsen - Klyng - Holt 2013).

In 2012, Denmark was one of nine countries to meet the Barcelona target of 33% ECEC attendance for children under three years of age (the others were Sweden, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, France, Slovenia, Spain, Portugal)

(European Commission 2013). There is an entitlement to ECEC from 6 months of age (Dagtilbudsloven): 67% of children under three and 97% above three and below school age attend.

Parents must pay a fee for the daycare, which covers up to 25% of the cost (the rest is financed by the municipality). The fee varies from municipality to municipality, but the average is around 395€⁷ pr. month for children between 0 and 2, and about 230€ for children from 3 until school age, including meals (Statistics Denmark A). Opening ours are generally from around 7 o'clock in the morning until 5 o'clock in the afternoon, with some possible variations. The fee is reduced based on household income up as stipulated by law (Socialministeriet). An annual household income below app. 22,680€ (170101 DKK pr. January 1 2017) equals a 100 % reduction of the fee. The reduction gradually decreases until an annual income of app. 70,425€ in which case full fee must be paid. Single parents and households with more than one child have a higher income threshold before the full fee must be paid and there is a discount on the fee for siblings.

The day care institutions are mainly public and has a high degree of educated staff (with a bachelor degree in pedagogy) and is generally considered high quality (Nørregård-Nielsen 2006, EVA 2016). In 2004 a national ECEC curriculum was introduced as a means to improve learning outcome and school readiness, thus emphasizing learning as part of the focus in public childcare institutions (Dagtilbudsloven). The balance between learning and care in Danish ECEC is the object of political debate, but the attending daycare is generally seen as something children should be doing (Dencik - Jørgensen - Sommer 2008, EVA 2016). Having your children in public day care is not seen as a substitute for family care, but as a cultural norm: something one must use as a responsible parent, because it is also benefitting the child.

3.1. *The changing role of fathers in Denmark?*

The labor market participation of women between 25 and 74 years in DK is high. In 2016 it was 64.8% for women vs. 73.9% for men. The employment rate was 61.7 % vs. 70.4% for women and men in the same age category (Statistics Denmark B).

Even though the rates are not symmetrically balanced they are still considered quite equal both by European and Nordic Standards. However, if we look at part-time employment, gender differences become more evident: in 2016 9.5 % of all men between 25-49 years of age were employed part time, whereas the rate was more than twice as high for women (28.0 %) (Nordic Statistics B).

This gender inequality can also be found in the take up of parental leave: in 2013 37% of all fathers used up some parts of the 32 weeks of the parental leave available for sharing between both parents. This is a slight increase from 2009. One reason behind this increase could be that collective agreements have introduced incentives for fathers to take up part of the parental leave with use-it or lose-it daddy quotas. Through these agreements an additional parental leave model was introduced in the public sector in

⁷ 1 EUR = 7,5 DKK (approximately).

2008. This means that if both parents work in the state sector the father was entitled to 6 weeks of fully paid leave, the mother was entitled to 6 weeks of fully paid leave and the parents could share 6 weeks of fully paid leave. The fathers' and the mothers' entitlement to fully paid leave was earmarked and could not be transferred. Similar (although not as generous) schemes were introduced in most other sectors (Bloksgaard - Rostgaard 2016). It is important to emphasize that these schemes were not introduced by law but through collective bargaining, thus reflecting the trade unions political agenda. Regardless these models represent an improvement in fathers' access to leave, but even with these improvements 18% of all fathers take no leave at all, not even the 2 weeks of paternity leave. Moreover, 45 % of all fathers only take paternity leave and no parental leave. Conversely 99.4% of all mothers take up maternity leave (Statistics Denmark C). This unequal pattern is also evident if we measure the take up of parental leave days. In 2014 Danish fathers only took up 8.6% of the leave days associated with childbirth: the rest was taken by mothers. This is considerably less than both Iceland (fathers take 29.4% of the days), Sweden (27.4%) or Norway (22.5%) where a paternity leave quota was introduced by law.

In 2013 there was a push to introduce leave days reserved for fathers. The newly elected Social Democratic lead government set out to introduce new parental leave legislation which would introduce a father quota. The Prime Minister, Helle Thorning Schmidt, initially argued that the aim was to give fathers a right to care (Petersen 2013). Despite these intentions, the government never converted it's declared agenda into legislation or put any proposal to a vote in parliament. The minister of labor market affairs, Mette Frederiksen, justified the government's decision not to introduce a father quota: «The government wishes that fathers would take up more parental leave – both out of consideration for the children, the fathers and the families and as a means to promote gender equality. But the right way is not to make these decision for the family by law» (Frederiksen 2013).

This may be interpreted as the prevalence of traditionalistic norms of fatherhood and an understanding of men as someone who generally do not want to care (for their children) but must be made to do so. Not quite the Nordic Nirvana of Gender Equality, that Lister (2009: 242) refers to.

Yet before we come to the conclusion that Danish fathers generally orient towards traditionalistic gender norms, we should consider other trends too. First of all, Danish fathers take up more and more leave days every year. For couples where both parents have taken up leave, fathers have increased their average days on leave by 12.5% from 2007 until 2013, whereas the number of days have only increased by 1.7% for mothers (Statistics Denmark A). Even though mothers still take up the majority of leave days we are witnessing a rather significant rise in the average amount of days that fathers spend on leave. Similar development was found by Bonke (2009) who studied time-use. In 1987 mothers spent 194% more time on childcare than fathers, while this difference was 40% in 2009. Even though this does not reflect an equal distribution of child care task between fathers and mothers it shows that change is happening. This change can be seen as a gradual shift in the everyday practices of fatherhood (Nielsen - Westerling 2016; Westerling 2015)

IV - DISCUSSION

In both Italy and Denmark, we find institutional support of fatherhood involvement in family life. Both political agendas and welfare provisions are focused on promoting a gender equal distribution of care in the family (Table 1). The Italian introduction of a shared parental leave and a bonus if the father takes some months of leave – and policies have aimed at promoting maternal employment with financial benefit for childcare services – have had some effect. Yet Italian women still take parental leave more than men. The gender gap in employment and care practices means that gender inequality persists. The involvement of Italian fathers is still limited and paternal leave is more symbolic than effective. While Danish fathers spend more time on leave than Italian fathers, Danish fathers can hardly be said to take an equal share of the care task either (Bonke 2009). Despite both normative and policy prioritization of equality and involved fatherhood clear reflections of traditional gender models is manifested as practice in Denmark. The Danish version of the Nordic model is no short cut to gender equality (Borchorst 2009).

TABLE 1 – *Leaves and childcare arrangement in Italy and Denmark*

	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Denmark</i>
Female employment rate	48.3	61.7
Part time work (women)	32.7%	28%
Leave model (Wall - Escobedo 2013)	<i>Short leave modified male-bre- adwinner model</i>	<i>One-Year-Leave' Gender- Equality-Orientated Model</i>
Maternity leave	5 months, compulsory, paid at 80% of the salary	18 weeks (4.5months)
Paternity leave	2-day compulsory fully-paid and 2 days optional	2 weeks
Parental leave	6 months, individual non- transferable entitlement, paid at 30% till the child is 6 years old, then unpaid till child age of 12 1 month-bonus for fathers	32 weeks (8 months) of paren- tal leave (full-time or part-time) shared between the parents – extended up to 46 weeks (11.5 months) for persons employed (including the self-employed)
Take up of parental leave	Mainly mothers	Mainly mothers
Cash benefits	800 € bonus for childbirth; baby bonus, for low-income families, of 80 € per month for three years	Cash benefits are available during the leave: 560 € per week during all leaves
As alternative to the parental leave	Voucher for nurseries or a baby-sitting voucher	
ECEC	Attendance of childcare services, children under 3 years: 23%; children between 3 and school age: 91%	Attendance of childcare ser- vices, children under 3 years: 67%; children between 3 and school age: 97%

This leads to questions about what else is shaping gender relations and practices and what other measures could promote equity. In this discussion, it is important to

note that cultural ideas shared by people about which conditions are most suitable for children's upbringing and about the «normal» gendered division of work within the family are both relevant. Even though different and conflictual cultural models certainly coexist within the same country, cultural norms and scripts play a crucial part.

In Italy, the cultural idea about childhood is traditionally based on the assumption that the home is the best place for childcare (at least for children below the age of three), thus showing a family-oriented culture concerning responsibilities for children (Costa 2014). While the family is certainly still seen as the primary base for children in Denmark, the responsibilities for childcare are also considered as something which is shared with the state (Dencik 2005; Lind et al. 2016). This notion has developed over time. In the 1960s and 1970s the day care institutions were seen as a supplement to family care but during the 1980s and beyond a public and political consensus was established; being in public care from an early age was an important part of children's development (Grumløse 2014). This consensus was supported and fertilized by leading and influential experts on children (Dencik 2005). But the everyday experience of high quality daycare that parents and children made for themselves was an equal important part of this development. Esping-Andersen (2016) argues that a high quality childcare has been critical to Nordic mothers labor market participation and, moreover, that this paves the way for active father involvement and the egalitarianism that is displayed in the Nordic countries. The difference between Denmark and Italy in fertility rates supports this argument. In Denmark fertility rate is 1.7, one of the higher in Europe, while it is 1.3 in Italy. Other studies show that in Italy women tend to reduce their working time due to family reasons (Pacelli et al. 2013). The Danish leave policies model makes the transition from paid work to care work flexible, while the Italian model prioritize family and primary network over state institutions in the provision of care.

The comparison shows that the role and quality of childcare services is important and the gap between leave policies and childcare services in Italy contributes to traditional division of gender roles.

In Italy, there is not an effective ECEC entitlement and childcare costs are different between public (around 400€) or private (600€) services. Moreover, private services provide higher quality in terms of education and time flexibility. This supports families' orientation to care for children at home during the first year with the help of grandparents, which reinforces the *familistic* culture in Italy: the cultural belief and norm that family network provide important help (Rossi 2009).

In Denmark service provisions, such as the availability of high quality day care, has contributed to women's labor market participation being almost the same as men's (Melby - Ravn - Wetterberg 2009), which have paved the way for fathers increased involvement in intimate child care in dual earner families. This involvement includes experiences of caring which facilitates learning processes of caring as part of being a father and not in contradiction with masculinity (Nielsen - Westerling 2016). It is relevant to note, that this is not translated into a general shift towards a gender equal sharing of domestic care practices. In Denmark men and women may equally share paid work, but they do not equally share care and domestic practices. To further promote

gender equal care practices policies and service provisions must be developed. This is the case for both Denmark and Italy.

V - CONCLUSION

This contribution was aimed at critically discussing if and how transformations in fatherhood practices challenge existing gender norms. Looking at Italy in the light of Danish policies and instruments can contribute to understand fatherhood in a wider perspective including policies, childcare services and gender relations in care and work dynamics. There is a complex mix of elements shaping fatherhood and fathering practices so the outcome of specific policies in different countries can produce both similarities and dissimilarities.

From the policy perspective, changes currently taking place in Italy need a multi-dimensional approach to better achieve results in terms of equity or traditional practices. In Italy, internal contradictions are evident in terms of how policies promote equity between mothers and fathers' rights: promoting continuity to work, which is a central point on the political agenda, could reinforce the idea that priority is given to women employment and equal sharing of care is not included.

The analysis has shown powerful cultural ideas, such as considering home as the primary place for raising children as well as the mother as the primary caregiver, remain influential. While increased emphasis on fatherhood transformation is evident in Italy, the male breadwinner model remains dominant thus confirming the weakness of «fatherhood regime» (Ruspini - Tanturri 2017: 114). Traditional gender practices are still crystallized despite policy measures. However, this is also the case for Denmark. To conclude this reflection on how the transformations in fatherhood practices and policies have challenged traditional gender norms and practices, we suggest three main points:

1) the crucial role of childcare is evident in both countries. Both in terms of availability and quality. It seems especially for Italy to support the political agenda of father involvement and to promote flexibility and opportunity for women to choose to work.

2) the orientation of policy instrument toward women's condition is not sufficient. A family friendly welfare state must include specific leave periods for fathers (i.e. daddy quota) in order to promote gender equality.

3) fathers are oriented towards change and involvement, but the move away from traditionalistic gender norms needs policy measures in order to accelerate.

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