

## **FATHER IN CHARGE? MEN IN PARENTAL LEAVE**

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*Abstract: Almost all the mothers take the maternity leave and stay at home with their child couple months or years. And generally the fathers do not take paternal leave. Even if they take a few days off right after the child arrived, usually the fathers do not leave the labor market for childcare reason. But in many countries the share of men among parental leave users is rising (Finland, Portugal etc.). The increase of fathers' involvement has a lot of positive outcome: could help women recover from pregnancy and childbirth, is good for child health, and has a positive impact on female employment, which might reduce the family's poverty risk. Parental leave may also help reduce discrimination against women in the workplace and particularly in hiring.*

*What is the case in Romania in these days? We propose a case study to analyze the motivation of those men, who are taking paternal leave (between 1 month and 2 years). A qualitative research could help us in understanding what kind of motives can be identified behind such kind of decision. What kind of labor market position, opportunity and activity can be observed in their cases? Can be identified a financial decision behind the paternal leave? How important is the wife's carrier in this scenario? By the help of semi-structured interviews, taken with fathers who are in paternal leave (or were in the last 5 years) we hope we might be able to have a more detailed answer regarding to the fathers' role in paternal leave and child care and division of housework in the modern contemporary family.*

*Keywords: family, parenting, parental leave, maternity leave, child rearing*

### **1. Introduction**

In the contemporary, mainly western societies, fathers are more and more involved in children's lives than before (O'Brien et al., 2007). Across all the world can be observed a change in the role of father, however the changes varies. Timing and pace of change varies widely across countries (O'Brien et al., 2007, Huerta et. al. 2013). The expectations regarding to the fathers' involvement are changing: they are no longer supposed to be exclusively breadwinners, but are more likely to share caring responsibilities (Huerta et.al 2013). And important progresses can be observed, but the main caregivers are still the women. And this "gap" can be observed even in the Scandinavian countries, where the gender equality regarding to housework division is much more ideal than in the other OECD countries (Huerta et.al., 2013). A lot of social, economical and cultural changes occurred in the last few decades, and all these changes have reshaped the housework and care activities. The increased female employment had maybe the biggest impact: today in the majority of couple families (in most OECD countries) both of the partners are money earners (OECD, 2011). Since everybody has work responsibilities as well, first of all a

the household and childcare responsibilities have to be reorganized and redesigned. And, both the mothers and the fathers as well have to find “a new balance between work and family responsibilities” (Huerta et. al. 2013: 8). The majority of respondents in each European Member State (84%) agree that it is all right that men are doing an equal share of household activities, and in the same time 8 in 10 EU citizens agree also with the parental leave taken by men (84% as well) (Gender Gap 2017). The data show as well that the educational level highlights a difference: the longer a respondent remained in education, they are to approve parental leave and housework involvement more likely. Almost all the respondents (90%) who completed their education aged 20+ has a positive view about men taking parental leave, those who completed education aged 15 or younger, this proportion is 75%. Almost all respondents in Sweden (96%), Malta and Finland (both 95%) approved of men taking parental leave, compared to 62% in Romania (Gender Gap 2017).

Because of this type of changes, in many OECD countries there were introduced family-friendly policies in order to help mothers and fathers to find their preferred balance between family and work (OECD, 2011, Huerta et. al 2013). Even more, in the last decade, these policies aim to help the fathers’ decision and to support their more accentuated involvement in babies and young children caring. Every country may have different goal with these policies, but mainly all these policies are initiated to minimize the gender gap and to help in enhance the father-child relationships, moreover to improve the child well-being (Rostgaard, 2002, Huerta et.al. 2013).

## **2. Literature**

Empirical data show, that a lot of fathers are taking time off work around childbirth (O’Brien et al., 2007). And in countries, where there is no legal parental-leave possibility, they use other types of leave (La Valle et al., 2008; and, Whitehouse et al., 2007). According to the literature, where fathers take parental leave, this has a positive impact on childcare and housework duties (O’Brien and Moss, 2010, Tanaka – Waldfoegel, 2007). Studies also shown that the fathers’ involvement have a lot of benefits for children (OECD, 2012a; Sarkadi et al., 2008; and, WHO, 2007), but for fathers themselves as well (Baxter and Smart, 2011; Smith, 2011; and, WHO, 2007). According to empirical data, in comparison with those fathers who are spending less time with their children, fathers who spend time with their children and are more involved in housework, can have a (1.) labour market benefits (Smith, 2011), (2) can experience lower divorce risk (Sigle-Rushton, 2010), and (3) are also more satisfied with their lives (Eggebeen, 2001).

There are a few countries, like Australia, Denmark, UK and US, where the majority of fathers (80% or more) take some time off work when their child is born. Which suggests that fathers are interested in leaving work for a few days or few weeks in the post-natal period. The number of days is different: for example 90% of Danish fathers are taking two or more weeks off, in US only 33% (Huerta et. al. 2013: 9). Those fathers, who took time off work during the child’s first year seems to have a more favorable position: were highly educated, native-born, married, had full-time work and higher incomes (Huerta et. al. 2013: 9). According to analysis, “fathers’ leave, father’s involvement and child development are related” (Huerta et. al. 2013: 10). In the same time, fathers participate more likely in child-care related tasks if there are parental leave policies. However, these policies need to be attractive to working parents, so have to be highly elaborated.

Empirical data shows that there are two main impact factor group: the payment and the entitlement. Fathers take paternity and parental leave more often, if this is not an income shortfall, when it is paid and well-paid. Secondly, when it cannot be transferred to his partner, so or it is used, or it is lost (Huerta et. al. 2013: 10). However, these policies always need to be augmented with other family-friendly policies. For example if there are no flexible work possibilities, less fathers could choose a parental and paternal leave. Or without elaborated childcare services, such as nurseries, also can be more difficult to choose the leave.

All OECD countries (except US), provide nationwide paid maternity leave. Half of them also offer paternity leave to fathers right after childbirth. Paid parental leave (can be used) by both parents – is available in 23 OECD countries, but uptake by fathers is low. Fathers are more likely to take paid parental leave if encouraged by “daddy quotas” or bonus months. By enabling fathers to take on a greater share of the childcare burden, parental leave can support women’s careers. Flexible leave arrangements, such as part-time working, can ease the financial cost of taking leave and make it easier for parents to remain in touch with work (OECD Report, 2016) Among the benefits of the paternal leave we can enrollee: could help women recover from pregnancy and childbirth, is good for child health. Also has a positive impact on female employment, which might reduce the family’s poverty risk. In the same time may also help reduce discrimination against women in the workplace and particularly in hiring.

### **3. Romanian context**

Regarding to the length of parental leave – Romania has a very generous, child-friendly (and mother-friendly) child-rearing leaves system in the EU (Pop 2016). Mothers can take off a one or two year long parental leave, with a monthly indemnity of 85% of the average monthly income of the last 12 months before the child was born. Since 1<sup>st</sup> March 2012, a new regulation applies to children, which is imposed by virtue of the principle that child care is the responsibility of both parents. One parent can take 11 or 23 months, the second parent (in majority of the cases: the father) has the right to one month of parental leave. Compensation and leave are suspended for the other parent for this month and the first parent will have the choice of taking an unpaid leave or going back to work. In very few cases the father is taking the parental leave (1 or two years). But the number of those fathers, who are taking off that 1 month is a bit higher, even if under 3%. According to the Labour Ministry, in 2013 792 men applied for this right of 1 month paternal leave from 153,148 fathers (0.54%), in 2014 3484 from 122527 (2.84%), and in 2015 1573 from 125108 (1.26%).

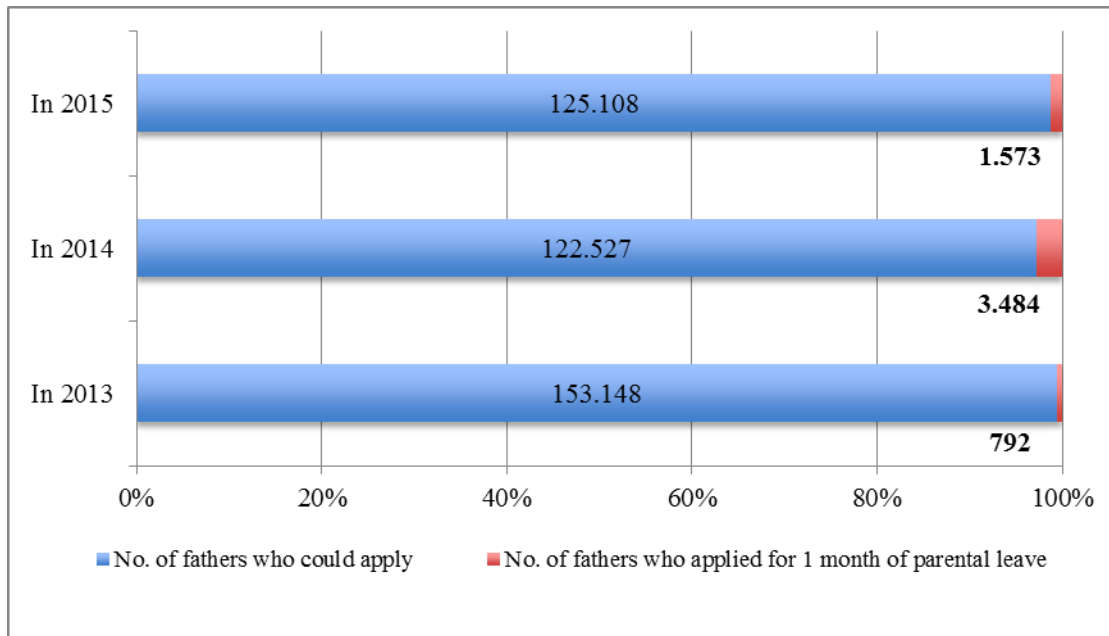


Figure 1. Proportion of the fathers who took 1 month parental leave in Romania<sup>1</sup>

Mothers (and fathers too) receive a monthly benefit of 85 per cent from the average of their net income in the last 12 months of the last two years prior of child birth, but no less than 85 per cent of the basic minimum wage in the country (Macht – Popescu 2017). This minimum is in present 1065 RON. If the a mother choose returns to labour market earlier than the second birthday of the child, will get a monthly insertion stimulus for the next 12 months.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Indemnizația pentru creșterea copilului ar putea fi plafonată la 8.000 de lei, iar perioada de stat acasă modificată <http://www.totuldespremanea.ro/utile/legislatie/indemnizatia-pentru-cresterea-copilului-ar-putea-fi-plafonata-iar-perioada-de-stat-acasa-cu-copilul-modificata>

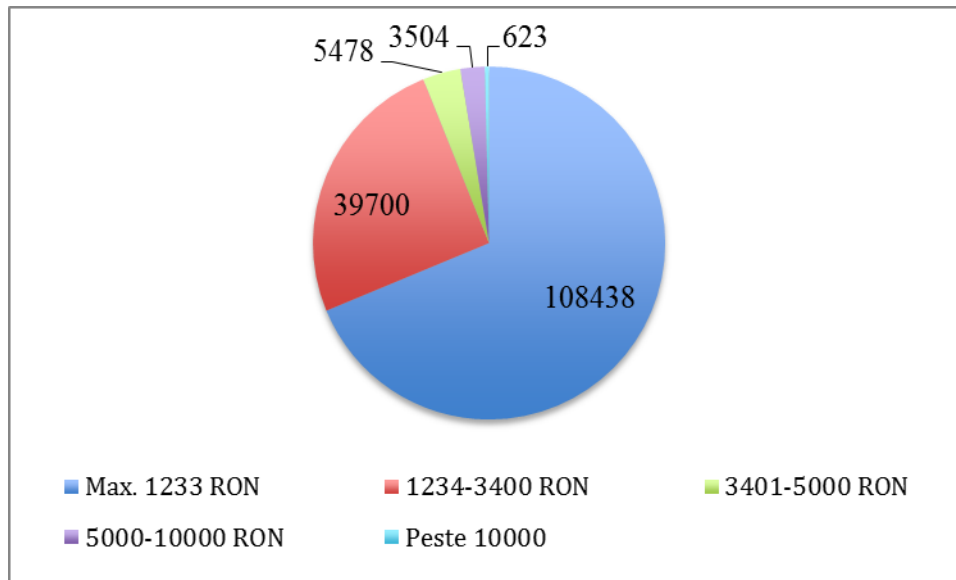


Figure 2. Income categories among the beneficiaries', March 2017.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. Methodology

We propose a small-scale case study to analyze the motivation of those men, who are taking paternal leave (between 1 month and 2 years). By using semi-structured interviews, taken with fathers who are in paternal leave (or were in the last 5 years) we hope we might be able to have a more detailed answer regarding to the fathers' role in paternal leave and child care and division of housework in the modern contemporary family.

There were taken 10 interviews: 8 with fathers, 2 with employer of the social administration office from Miercurea Ciuc, Harghita County. All the interviewed fathers have university degree, having age between 31-41. Five of them are living in village, three in town (M. Ciuc and surroundings).

These data were augmented with a desk research, a statistical data analysis (provided by the institute), which help in the contextualization of the issue. And also a lot of discussions with plenty of mothers in the last 3-4 years about the topic.

Our research questions were: (1.)What is the case in Romania in these days? (2.) What kind of motives can be identified behind such kind of decision. (3. )What kind of labor market position, opportunity and activity can be observed in their cases? (4) Can be identified a financial decision behind the paternal leave? (5.) How important is the wife's carrier in this scenario?

#### 5. Findings

If there would be available nation data, we could draw a picture about the "national"

<sup>2</sup> Source: Press Release, Labor Ministry (2017) Indemnizația pentru creșterea copilului, plafonată la 8500 lei, începând din luna septembrie <http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/comunicare/comunicate-de-presa/4941-cp-plafonare-icc-04082017> 04.08.2017. (last visited: 26.11.2017).

perspective. And also would be possible to compare our qualitative data with the data from other counties. But since there are no available data in this question, our findings are hard to identify similarities and differences. So there are no nation data available (only from the media). If we would draw a map, in the big cities and metropolitans would be more likely to have higher proportion of fathers, who take this 1 month parental leave.

In Harghita County only very few (1% of the fathers) take the parental leave for 1 or 2 year (in HR). In case of the 1 month long parental leave is a bit different: less than 10% of the fathers obtain for it. Only one from ten fathers take the chance.

According to the interviews with the specialist from the County Office of Parental Leave Issues and the fathers, we could enroll *four group of factors*, considering being important in this decision: taking a parental leave for 1 month or more. We think, that a lot of factors are contribute in such a decision. With the help of the specialist, who analyze – during their every day professional life – parental leave applications, and the discussion with fathers who applied for such leave in the last 5 years, we consider, that the socio-demographical factors, the labor-market and carrier factors, the economical factors and the personal factors in some proportion have an impact in this kind of decision making.

#### *5.1 Socio-demographical factors:*

- number of small children in the family. In every case where the father decided to take the parental leave longer than 1 month, there were at least 2 or 3 children under 6 in the family. We presume that after 2-5 years of child rearing have more experience and thus more confidence in their ability of taking care of a child.

- the active presence of the grandparents seems to be crucial: in 7 cases from 8 the husband could count in everyday practice on the grandparents' help. Seems that the absence of the grandparents' active help has a negative impact on fathers willing of taking parental leave

#### *b) Labour-market and carrier factors:*

- better labor market position - the majority of those fathers, who are applying for the 1 month long parental leave, have a “good” (better) job opportunity than the average, earn better, have no fear of loosing their job, and “can afford” to take a small brake.

- the fathers are working in administration, education or civil sector. From labour market point of view working in a less accentuated competitive sphere,

- important carrier opportunities for the wife – the specialist presented some cases, in which the mother was in high position, and to not loose the promotion or good position, she returned as soon as possible on labour market, and the father went on maternity leave: ex. Doctor, university teacher, director of an institute. From our 8 fathers 2 mentioned about this kind of situation: in one case the wife was working in a bank earning very good, in other cases the wife was a teacher, and she had a better job offer, which had to be taking at the moment.

- the wife has to restart her job earlier from some reason, (for eg. in education, the school starts

in September, or the second semester starts in February etc.)

- husband's carrier has a nadir, is in crises. In some cases the specialists and the fathers as well mentioned about a tight corner, from where this parental leave was a good loophole. Lost his job, problems at workplace, restructuration at workplace etc. For 2 from our 8 fathers this was the most important factor.

*"Those fathers take the paternal leave who have to. Those who have some problems with their work place, their position, their income. They have or a misunderstanding with their boss, or they want to change work and they need time to find a new job" (Specialist 1.)*

*"My earlier job was wind up. And it was promised another job, but I had to wait a few months. They said. (After all it took 18 months...). In this situation we decided that my wife goes back to work and I stay home with our two small children, the bigger one was 2,5 the smaller one was 10 months old. I had no income, I did not get any money from state or from elsewhere, our only income was my wife's salary" (39y, urban, university, 3 children, bank sector, for 18 months)*

- the husband wants a carrier change – 3 from our 8 fathers mentioned that they wanted to get some time to be able to make a carrier decision.

*"For me it is somehow a necessity: I had to choose to take this year or have no income. I work for a civil organization, and we do not have any money for my salary. But I do not want to go to work somewhere else, so I guess I will find a solution during this year" (31y, rural, university, 2 children, civil sector, for 12 months)*

#### *c) Economical factor*

- the husband salary (income) is higher, so is a better economical decision in case of taking 1 month leave. According to the specialist, mainly those fathers are taking this 1 month leave, whose salary is higher than the wife's salary.

- the wife's salary is higher than the husband's – they enrolled some cases, in which the mother is doctor, lawyer, director etc., and has a higher salary. In this case for some families is a better economical decision to get the 100% of a higher, and get the 85% of a lower salary. In none from our 8 fathers was this case.

*"In very-very few cases. In case of a layer for example. The doctors no, because very often their husband is a doctor as well. But they usually take only a few months or a year."(Specialist 2.)*

#### *d) Personal and emotional factors*

- spend more time with the children, concentrate more on family

*“We had 4 children in 5 years. And in these 5 years my wife had to handle the family mainly without me. I worked a lot, and my work program was very long, from 8.a.m. often to 7 p.m. And and even on Saturdays. I decided to be involved more, to spend more time with the kids, to be at home, to be more help. And I stay at home for already more than 9 months. (...) I do not work. Two times a week I go to the town, I meet people, I keep in touch, I have a few ideas and projects, but I do not rush anything. I have time, more than one year.”* (35y, rural, university, 4 children, business sector, for 24 months)

- experimenting something new – slow down, or have a break, or living the moment

*“My wife had to go back earlier for not losing her earlier job. But anyway I wanted to take out that 1 month, in our case 2 months with the 2 children. My director was not happy about it, they said I will lose my position if I take out 2 months. I said: go ahead. I don't care. Those were the best 2 months of my last 10 year. I would recommend to all dads”* (41y, urban, university, 4 children, state administration sector, for 2 months)

- the job is vocation for the wife – Two fathers mentioned, that even before having children, their wives loved their job very much, and since for them is a very important personal need doing that vocational job, they wanted to support them and help them to be able to return to work earlier and without other arrangements

*“We decided to have a share parental leave: the first year took my wife, the second year is mine. My wife loves her job, she returned to work after 10 months even with our first child. So for her was not a problem, won't be this time as well. Yes, with 2 children under 3 will be harder. But our parents will help.”* (31y, rural, university, 2 children, civil sector, for 12 months)

## **6. Conclusions**

To the question, what kind of labor market position, opportunity and activity can be observed in their cases we can answer nobody has a very high income, but nobody a very low (average or a bit higher than the average in the county). Only one person had a job in the state sector (teacher in elementary school). Everybody had a good labor market ground, almost all of them had more previous jobs, might easily find a new job and are familiar with labor market changes, challenges.

Yes, can be identified a financial decision behind the paternal leave: almost in all the cases the fathers affirmed in this way the family had a little bit bigger income. But this was not the main motivation anyway.

According to the interviews: the wife's carrier in this scenario has importance: in three cases from eight was clearly mentioned that they wanted to support the wife's carrier or vocational ambitions. But, since this small population is a very-very minority regarding to the hall population of father having children under 6, we presume that this is also a very particular characteristic of these fathers. Who are more open minded, more modern, consider more equal their partner than the average. And because of this their wife's carrier could have the same



importance as their own carrier, or in some point ever more importance.

At the end we have to mention, that parental leave policies would need to be complemented with other family-friendly policies, flexible working practices and childcare services. Our impression is, that much more fathers would experience at least one month or more longer parental leave, if they shouldn't leave their job. On the other hand, those who do not have grandparental help, have no courage to experiment this.

It would be very important, on community level, to discuss much more regarding to this topic, because there is a need to start provoking changing mindsets, changing mentality. There would be great need of information-campaign, communication campaigns, in order to promote men's use of leave entitlements and other workplace family-friendly practices. Also pre- and postnatal administration proceedings should be used as an opportunity for informing parents about the importance of both maternal and paternal involvement on child development and the importance of getting involved early in life. Civil actors (associations etc.) could help in good practices and solution finding.

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