

EXTENDED

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**Gender equalization of childcare: could non-transferable parental leave months be a gamechanger?**

### **Introduction**

The equalisation of childcare responsibilities between men and women is a key family policy priority in the EU, as set out in numerous strategic documents. One of the most recent of these is EU Directive 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and carers (EU, 2019). This directive required countries to introduce measures to encourage fathers to take on childcare responsibilities and balance family and professional life. At the national level, the directive has been implemented in various ways: some countries have introduced a new type of leave targeting fathers. This paper focuses on Lithuania, where parental leave policies were modified in 2023 and a new type of leave was introduced: non-transferable parental leave months (NTPM). The NTPM leave scheme is a "take it or leave it" policy.

This paper aims to identify trends in the uptake of NTPM by fathers in Lithuania and reveal the socio-economic and family-related factors contributing to the use of this new family policy measure. Our analysis is based on a dataset linking national registers and Lithuanian Social Insurance Agency data. Consequently, our analysis includes all individuals entitled to NTPM and other forms of parental leave since January 2023. Our database consists of over 88 thousand cases and covers a period of 22 months. To our knowledge, this is the first study related to changes in the parental leave scheme in Lithuania based on population-level data.

### **Incomplete gender revolution and policy response**

The equalisation of gender disparities in childcare contributes to women's participation in the labour market, gender equality in society, and the well-being of men, women, and children within families. Although structural and cultural shifts in recent decades have transformed the role of fathers within the family, this change has generally been described as slow and even stagnant. The gender revolution

theory highlights two stages in the transition of gender roles in society: the first relating to women entering the public sphere and the second relating to the transformation of men's roles in the private sphere (Goldscheider, Bernhardt & Lappegård, 2015). Women's integration into the public sphere has progressed more quickly than the expansion of men's responsibilities within the family. Some argue that this is due to men being less prepared for the carer role and the higher status of men in the public sphere (Goldscheider, 2024).

An incomplete gender revolution, i.e. gender asymmetry in the private sphere, affects childbearing and family stability and maintains structural gender inequalities. Therefore, equalising gender in care responsibilities requires a systemic approach from the welfare state. Activating the role of fathers in childcare is seen as one of the top objectives aimed at redressing the gender imbalance and structurally affecting gender relationships in society. One of the most recent examples at the policy level is the EU Directive 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and carers (EU, 2019). The implementation of the Directive has taken a variety of forms among EU countries; however, research evidence on the implementation process and, more importantly, the outcomes of changes to childcare policies is scarce. This study aims to address this issue by providing evidence from one EU country that introduced an additional type of parental leave and redesigned its childcare policy scheme in accordance with the Directive.

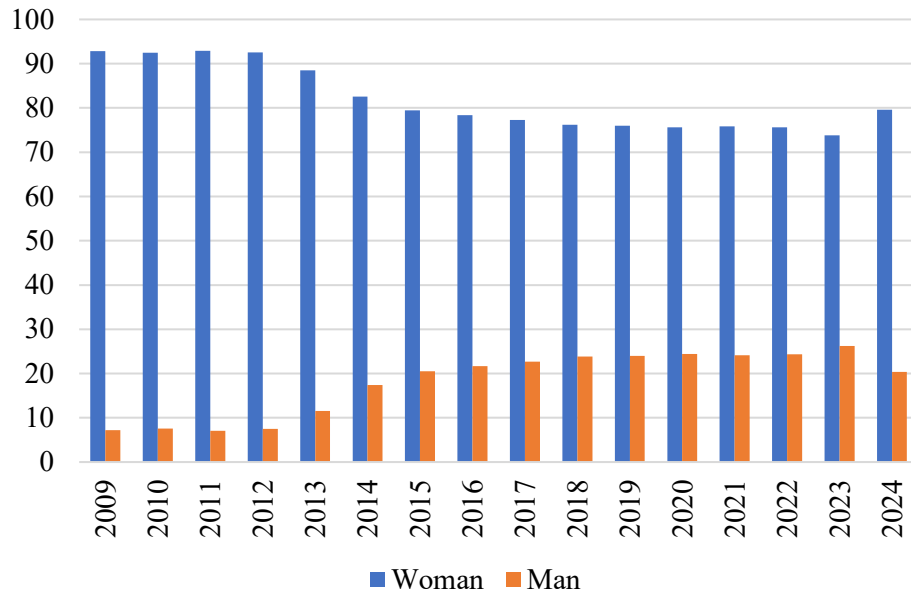
Though the evidence on the implementation of the Directive is scarce, the same cannot be said for the field of research on childcare policies. As childcare schemes differ in terms of the types of leave, those entitled to leave, the leave's duration and the level of replacement, the evidence is also very broad and complex. Some studies suggest that paternity leave can reduce the conflict between women's work and fertility intentions, positively impacting fertility (Farré, 2016; Hegewisch & Gornick, 2011; Geyer et al., 2015). The timing of the introduction of paternity leave, the specifics of the reform and the social context also play a significant role (Duvander et al., 2020). Non-transferable leave has been linked to increased take-up of leave by fathers, particularly when access to individual entitlement is available (Duvander & Johansson, 2012; Haas & Rostgaard, 2011). However, there is no evidence that non-transferable leave alone is sufficient to lead to increased use of parental leave by fathers, unless it is well paid (Karu & Tremblay, 2018).

## **Lithuania's childcare policy**

Lithuania's childcare leave policy is often described positively, with a focus on its beneficial impact on gender equality and work-life balance. Some comparative studies focusing on the Baltic and Nordic countries conclude that Lithuania offers generous and flexible childcare leave policies, relatively high levels of father involvement, and high income replacement rates, all of which promote work-life balance and gender equality. However, compared to the Nordic countries, Lithuania has lower rates of children aged 0–2 being enrolled in formal care (Aidukaite, 2021). Wesolowski, Billingsley and Neyer (2021) observe that, compared to the other two Baltic countries, Lithuania had higher income replacement rates and lower levels of male breadwinner family support in the 1990s. By 2015, leave-related support in Lithuania fully covered the average annual net wage of a production worker in the form of benefits, whereas in Estonia it was similar and in Latvia it was much lower (around 70%). Dobrotić and Stropnik (2020) conclude that, of the 21 European former socialist countries they compared, Lithuania is one of the few with an equality-transforming childcare leave policy design (it incentivises fathers to share the leave).

The design of childcare-related leave includes four measures. First, there is maternity leave, to which mothers are entitled, lasting 18 weeks (70 days before and 56 days after the birth). The replacement level is 77% of previous labour-related income, and eligibility criteria include 12 months of social insurance payments in the last 24 months. Secondly, following the birth of a child, fathers are also entitled to a non-transferable one-month paternity leave, with a replacement level of 77%. This 'daddy month' can be taken within the first three months after the birth. This measure was introduced in 2007, and currently around 50% of fathers take advantage of it. Thirdly, there is parental leave, which lasts for three years; however, the paid segment is only until the child is two years old. The three-year parental leave was introduced in 1989, but until 2008, the paid period was mostly one year. In 2008, the paid leave was extended to cover the child's second year of life. Since 2011, the parental leave can be shared between parents. Additionally, the leave scheme offers two options: leave until the child is either 18 months or two years old. In the first scenario, the replacement level is 77%; in the second, it is 58% in the first year and 38% in the second. Parents may work during their leave, but if they work during the first year, the benefit is reduced according to their income. A fourth type of leave is the non-transferable parental leave months, which were introduced in 2023 as part of the implementation of the EU work-life balance directive. The current scheme provides for two non-transferable months per parent, which are paid at 100% of their previous income.

Currently, parental leave is shared by approximately one-fifth of families. The option to share parental leave was introduced in 2011, with the proportion of fathers taking leave initially increasing, before stagnating (Figure 1). Some scholars have noted that the shared leave was often misused. Fathers formally took the leave and received the benefit, while at the same time being employed; meanwhile, mothers left their jobs to take care of the child (Norgélaite, 2018).



**Fig. 1.** Parental leave by sex of the parent, 2009-2024  
 Source: Board of the State Social Insurance Fund (SODRA), 2025

The take-up of the non-transferable parental leave months is so far under researched in Lithuania. Though the measure was introduced almost three years ago, there are no studies. To our knowledge this study is the first based on the population level data, which covers all parents entitled to the leave.

**Data and methods**

Our analysis is based on a dataset which links individual level data from the national registers and Lithuanian Social Insurance Agency (SODRA) data. Data set includes all individuals entitled to all forms of parental, paternal and maternal leaves. The observation period starts in 2023 January, when the NTPM was introduced and follows for the subsequent 22 months. There are approximately 88 thousand cases. The dataset includes information on:

1. Main sociodemographic characteristics (age, sex, country of citizenship, number of children, legal marital status of fathers and mothers). Data from the Population Register
2. Education level. Data from the Population and housing census 2021
3. Employment status (working / not working), occupation and income. Data from the SODRA
4. Recipients of various types of the parental leave benefits (non-transferable parental leave months, paternity, maternity, and parental leaves). Data from the SODRA.

Data were provided by the State Data Agency (Statistics Lithuania) in the State Data Governance Information System (Contract No: MT25.599). The data linkage and data analysis was conducted using the Palantir Foundry data management platform.

In the first step we conducted the descriptive analysis and the results are presented below. In the second step we will run the logistic regression models in order to determine the individual and couple related factors contributing to the take-up of the non-transferable months by fathers.

### **Preliminary results: descriptive analysis**

*Frequency of use of the NTPM and other forms of leave.* The frequency of use of the NTPM and other forms of leave is shown below. The descriptive analysis shows that only 16 per cent of fathers used the NTPM. This is substantially lower than the proportion of mothers who used it (Table 1). The NTPM is the least commonly used type of child-related leave among fathers. According to our results, 20 per cent of fathers took parental leave, while 54 per cent took the 'daddy months'.

Use of the NTPM by fathers is linked to other types of leave. Among those who used the NTPM, the majority also took the 'daddy months' (91 per cent) (Table 2) and 45 per cent took parental leave (Table 3).

Only 6.7 per cent of fathers used all three types of childcare leave: the NTPM, the 'daddy months' and parental leave. Additionally, 8.2 per cent of fathers used the NTPM and 'daddy months'.

Table 1. Non-transferable parental leave months by gender

	Mothers		Fathers	
		Per cent		Per cent
NTPM yes	27476	63,8	6760	16,4
NTPM no	15616	36,2	34427	83,6
	43092	100,0	41187	100,0

Table 2. Use of the NTPM and “daddy month” by fathers, per cent

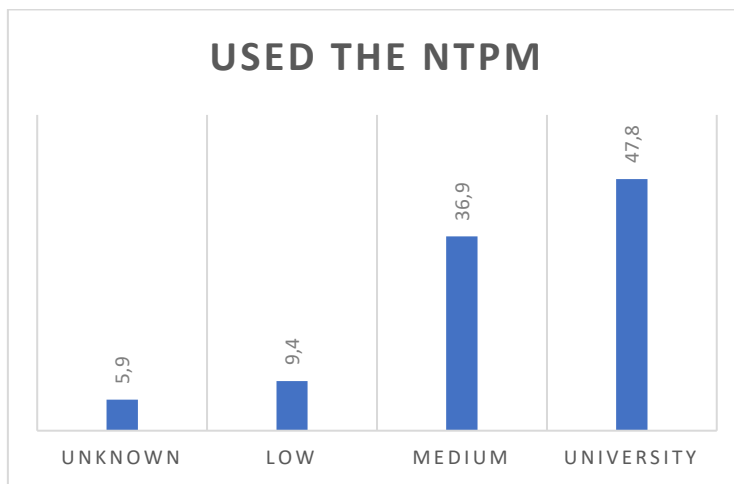
	NTPM NO	NTPM YES
“Daddy month” YES	46,8	91,2
“Daddy month” NO	53,2	8,8
	100,0	100

Table 3. Use of NTPM and parental use by fathers, per cent

	NTPM NO	NTPM YES
Parental leave YES	5,1	45,9
Parental leave NO	94,9	54,1
Parental leave YES	100	100

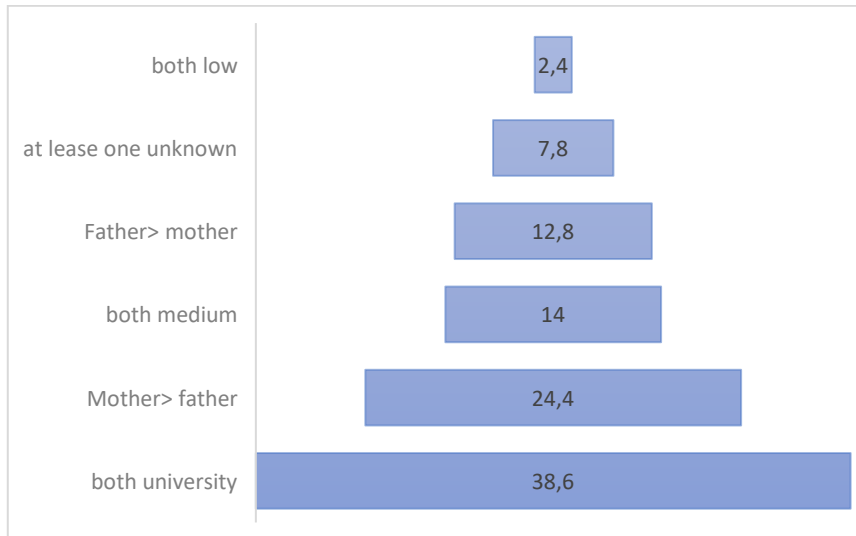
*Fathers using the NTPM and socio-economic differences.* Among fathers who used the NTPM, the majority are university-educated (Figure 2). Almost one-third have a medium level of education, and approximately 9 per cent have lower than secondary education. However, this distribution largely reflects the educational composition of the father population.

**Figure 2.** Fathers, who used the NTPM, by education, per cent



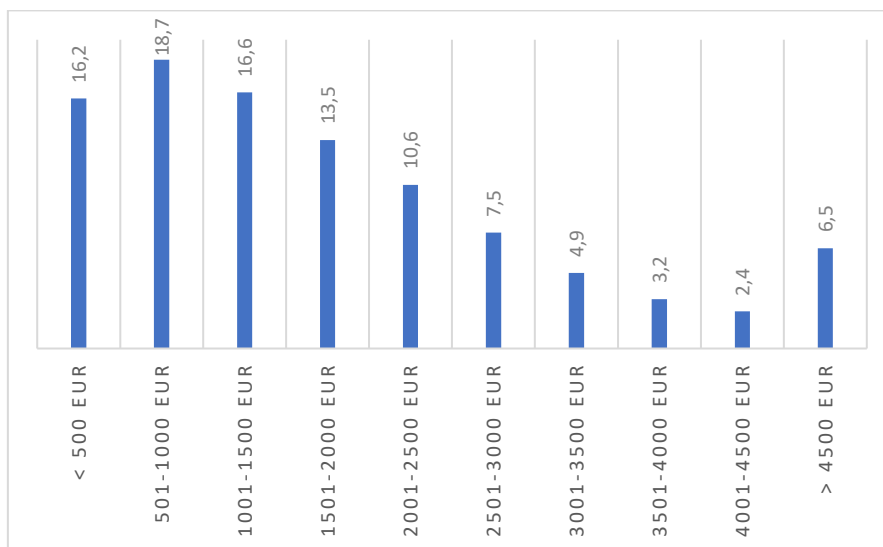
The educational background of NTPM users' fathers, when considered at the couple level, reveals some interesting results. Unsurprisingly, fathers from educationally homogeneous, university-educated couples make up the largest proportion of NTPM users. They account for 38.6 per cent of the sample. However, they account for only 13.8 per cent of fathers who are more highly educated than their partners, and 24.4 per cent of fathers whose partners are more highly educated.

**Figure 3.** Use of NTPM by fathers according to the couples' education, per cent



There is also income gradient among the NTPM using fathers (Figure 4). The higher the incomes, the lower is the take-up of the NTPM. We also accounted for the couple level incomes. 70 per cent of the NTPM users are couples, where at least one partner had the incomes lower than 500 euros.

**Figure 4.** Fathers' -users of the NTPM by monthly incomes



## Conclusions

This paper explores the use of one type of childcare leave: the non-transferable parental leave months introduced in Lithuania in 2023. This type of leave was introduced in line with EU Directive 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and carers (EU, 2019). Our analysis is based on population-level data linking national registers and data from the National Social Security Fund. To

our knowledge, this is the first national-level research of its kind, and one of the few in the region to focus on the implementation of EU Directive 2019/1158 and use this type of data.

Our preliminary results, based on descriptive analysis, show that NTPM is the least used type of childcare leave by fathers. Only 16 per cent of fathers took this type of leave. As our observation period encompasses the two years following the introduction of the NTPM, it is too early to draw robust conclusions about the success of this new measure. However, current estimates show that the new measure has not significantly increased the active involvement of fathers in early childcare.

In addition, our preliminary analysis shows that there is a strong socio-economic differentiation among fathers who use the NTPM. Higher-income couples have lower incentives to use this type of leave.

Further analysis will involve applying logistic regression models to estimate the factors contributing to the likelihood of fathers using the NTPM.

## Literature

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