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NEWS REPORT

Country:	Austria
Title:	A study shows that parental leave periods become shorter due to enhanced flexibility of benefits
Date:	2 March 2018
Expert:	Martina Thomasberger
<u>Context</u>	
Issue at stake:	Gender equality, gender pay gap, parental leave, labour market participation
Ground of discrimination:	Sex
Sources:	Miscellaneous
Field:	Parental Leave

Content

Labour market monitoring: For the third time the Federal Chamber of Labour has published a study in September 2017, covering data gathered from 2006 to 2014 on the average duration of Parental Leave periods and of specific benefit payments (Small Children's Benefit, *Kinderbetreuungsgeld*) combined with data on return to the workplace. It monitors the time period from the start of maternity leave periods for women and of paternity leave periods for men or, in cases where persons were previously not employed or registered as unemployed, from the start of the respective benefit period until the end of the respective leave. In all cases, the labour market status at the end of the defined periods was also monitored.

The study shows that women who were employed prior to a maternity/parental leave period return to the workplace on average after 607 days. 60% of this group return to the labour market before their child's second birthday. In cases where this period is followed by a partner's parental leave 74% of women return to employment. In comparison to earlier results, the duration of female leave periods has significantly decreased (from 702 days in 2006). This is partly due to the introduction of flexible benefit models that grant a higher per diem benefit for shorter uptake periods. Another factor influencing the total amount of leave taken by mothers, is the increased amount of fathers taking parental leave and the corresponding small children's benefit they receive ("*Kinderbetreuungsgeld*"). This is a family benefit for parents of small children that is granted for a maximum duration of 36 months with up to six months reserved for one parent. Due to the required structuring of this benefit, fathers usually take two to three months parental leave. In 2014, more than 9600 fathers received the relevant benefit in comparison to less than 3600 in 2006. Due to a legal change in 2010, by which the minimum required parental leave period was reduced from three months to two months, fathers now tend to take shorter leaves with higher benefit amounts. Average durations of parental leave for fathers decreased from 214 days in 2006 to 91 days in 2012.

Another significant factor for return to the workplace is an increase in the number of childcare facilities. From 2007 to 2012, the amount of children in childcare facilities for children under the age of three rose from 29 500 in 2007/2008 to 57 500 in 2014/2015 (last available reporting period). More than 20 000 of the newly created childcare facilities are compatible with full time work (i.e. open on workdays, for at least 60 hours per week and a maximum annual closing period of 5 weeks).

Key points of analysis: The ongoing monitoring shows that higher benefit amounts for parents of small children that are granted through shorter periods are a relevant and effective policy measure for shortening parental leave periods. Prior studies have consistently shown that longer leave periods contribute to reinforcing and stabilising the gender wage gap.¹ The present research also shows that participation of fathers in childcare can be raised by facilitating shorter break periods and more flexible uptake modalities for benefits.

Internet link source:

Long version:

https://media.arbeiterkammer.at/wien/PDF/studien/Wiedereinstiegsmonitoring_Oesterreich_2017.pdf

Press release:

<https://www.arbeiterkammer.at/interessenvertretung/frauen/Wiedereinstiegsmonitoring.html>

¹ E.g. Christine Mayrhuber, *Erwerbsunterbrechungen, Teilzeitarbeit und ihre Bedeutung für das Frauen-Lebenseinkommen*, (Österreichisches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung) Wien, 2010, http://www.forschungsnetzwerk.at/downloadpub/Lebenseinkommen_Frauen_Final.pdf, accessed 20 September 2017.