

# From introduction to Plenary Session II

## “Men Sharing the Care Burden”

At the Informal Meeting of Ministers of Employment, Social Affairs, Family and Gender Equality (EPSCO) in Tallinn 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of July 2017

Questions put forward by Christian Veske, European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)

Answers given by Ole Nordfjell, Reform – Resource Centre for Men

**Ole, Reform Centre is a non-governmental organization that works with men and masculinities in Norway. What practical help do you give, and what have you developed for new fathers to encourage them to be more involved in their children’s lives?**

I especially want to give my thanks to the Estonian Presidency and the Commission for putting the member states’ policies for work-life balance on the agenda, and men’s role in it. It is a gender equality issue to give men the possibility to be full-time carers and women the possibility to full-time workers. I was here one year ago by invitation from the Estonian Women’s Association Roundtable to talk about gender equality in day care. It is great to be back here in Tallinn.

Let me first say a couple of words about Reform – Resource Centre for Men in Norway. We are a national knowledge centre for men and gender equality. We are an NGO and our funding is from government, and from private and public funds. With the core staff of 7 persons, we do a lot of practical projects to promote men and gender equality.

Link to Reform’s webpage: <https://reform.no/about-reform-resource-center/>

I found Eurofound’s description of the situation yesterday very to the point. Eurofound showed us that men in the parental phase want to work less. This is no surprise.

Link to the Eurofound report: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/customised-report/2017/work-life-balance-and-flexible-working-arrangements-in-the-european-union>

There is a body of research showing that norms of fatherhood have changed. From around the 1990s, men have taken a stand against their own absent and authoritarian fathers, wanting egalitarian relationships with their partners, wanting to be emotionally available for their children. In short, spending time with their children and getting to know them as they grow up. Most men are motivated to fill part of the care-gap, but have little possibility to do so.

Many families are dependent on the father’s higher income, so he cannot reduce his working hours.

Or, as new research from our partners in Slovenia (The Peace Institute) have shown, many men are working without permanent employment and are afraid to exercise rights, like sick and paternity leave, in fear that the employer will not extend their contract and instead hire someone else, without caring obligations. (Note: In Norway, most workers in have permanent employment.)

In Norway, statistics shows that fathers actually have filled part of the care-gap. From 1990 till today, fathers of children under six have increased their household work from 3 ½ to 4 ½ hours a day, giving their partners more time for occupational work. Mother’s household working time was in 2010 about 6 hours a day, and they have reduced their household work almost as much as the fathers have increased theirs.

Link to the report from Statistics Norway "Fathers increased contribution to housework and care" (only in Norwegian language): <https://www.ssb.no/kultur-og-fritid/artikler-og-publikasjoner/fedre-deltar-mer-i-husarbeid-og-omsorg>

So, if we want men to fill the care-gap, we need to give them the chance to do so. And a substantial paid non-transferrable paternity leave is one important step. Work-life-balance-friendly employers are another important factor.

**For you as an NGO, what would you say have been the most important measures?**

Definitively the non-transferable paid paternity leave, currently with a duration of 10 weeks. It has shifted the norms and attitudes of employers, men, and society as such. Employers must take fathers as carers into account.

There are also important measures to be taken on at the business level.

In 2015 and 2016 we took part in a work-life balance project in Slovenia funded by Norway Grants (The Peace Institute in Ljubljana coordinated the project). The project targeted fathers and employers in five organizations. The struggle of fathers to combine caring and work is not so much talked about. So, you want fathers to start talking about being fathers, at work, the rewards and the pressure points that need to be resolved.

So, one of the things we did was to organize groups of fathers of small children.

And the next step was to discuss with the employers' possible measures in the organizations. Since businesses were different, so were the measures. For example, for the Slovenian Police one of the measures was a more flexible shift arrangement for the fathers, to be more in sync with their children's lives.

Link papers (no. 10 and 11) from the project "Fathers and employers in action": <https://reform.no/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Making-the-Invisible-Visible-Reprt.pdf>  
Link to project webpage: <http://www.mirovni-institut.si/en/enakopraven-oc/>

**Norway has several good practices in terms of men's involvement in formal early childhood education (high number of male teachers in formal childcare). How, in your view, has that had effect on men also taking up duties at home?**

Many years back I did fieldwork in a day care centre with a high percentage of male teachers. One of the kids, Sigurd, was asked: "Do you also want to work in day care when you grow up like Rasmus and the other men?" "No, I don't, it is not necessary, so many men do it." This was his reply.

Children pick up on what they experience. And, this is one aspect we now are developing further in Norway. Many municipalities in Norway offer jobs for secondary school boys to work as play pals at the local day care centre for some hours after school each week. It is a very popular job, and the hope is that we hook some of them up for later. That they start working as day care teachers.

Parents in Norway are strong advocates for men in day care. In some outdoor kindergartens, and day care centres in some part of the bigger cities, the percentage of men is between 20 and 30. This is an eye opener for many families coming to Norway to work or as refugees, having very different experiences.

For families, one of the important effects of this is communication, and conversation with day care staff about the child and its development. As both mothers and fathers drop off and pick up at the day care centre, communication will in many cases go easier with a mixed staff of women and men. More fathers feel at home in the day care centre and hang around to talk and listen.

Still the overall national ratio of men and women working in day care in Norway is very unbalanced with 9 percent men and 91 percent women.

**Panellists in the session:**

Christian Veske

Is stakeholders' relations coordinator at The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). At the Institute, he is also responsible for activities related to men and gender equality, most well-known of which is the Institute's White Ribbon Campaign.

Ole Bredesen Nordfjell

Senior Adviser at Reform. He is a sociologist with a specialization in the study of gender and masculinities. The focus of his work is on mapping, teaching, advocacy, and policy development in the field of men and gender equality. He has rich experience in developing, participating as well as managing projects. Reform is a national knowledge centre in Norway working with boys and men for gender equality.

Árni Páll Árnarson

Strategic Advisor, Former Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security of Iceland. Former Leader of the Social Democratic Party.

Dayle Rodriguez

UK Manager of Sentab. Sentab manufacture and service an online communications solution for carers and for care work.