



Opinion piece from Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

“Adapt parental insurance to suit modern working life”

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DN Debatt, 4 February 2016. Inquiry terms of reference. The parental insurance system needs to be modernised. It needs to be adapted to better suit entrepreneurs and students and its use facilitated for various kinds of family constellations. Progress towards more gender-equal sharing of parental insurance must be speeded up. The insurance system must also be easy to use.

On 4 February, the Government appointed an inquiry to review the entire parental insurance system. The goal is to present proposals before the end of this electoral period for an updated parental insurance system that is adapted to modern working life and a modern and gender-equal family life. This is the first time in ten years that a major review is being conducted and perhaps the first time ever that it has been done using such a broad approach.

Having children is a major life event. It is overwhelming, profound and involves a completely new piece in the puzzle of everyday life. The parental insurance system was established in 1974, when the politicians of the day did something very courageous. They introduced a whole new insurance system so that society would make it possible for parents – both women and men – to combine working life and family life.

The system has now been in place for over 40 years. Much has happened since that year when electricity was rationed in Sweden due to the oil crisis, Richard Nixon resigned as US president in the wake of Watergate and Abba's song Waterloo won the Eurovision Song Contest. We want parental

insurance to continue being an important form of insurance for both the individual and society, so we must be willing to allow it to be changed.

Naturally changes have taken place along the way. The insurance system has been expanded, compensation levels have been adjusted and months have been reserved for each parent. The fact remains, however, that the society we live in today – and the idea of the kind of society we want to live in tomorrow – has changed more rapidly than the insurance system. It doesn't just cover a few years while children are very young. Most people use it until their child is 12 years old, and some even longer – in other words it affects a large portion of children's lives and parents' professional lives. With this in mind, it is even more important that the system fits with our personal and working lives, today and in the future.

To achieve this we must review the insurance system, many parts of which are good, to see where it needs to be improved. Based on the challenges we see, the inquiry has five focus areas.

In parallel with the work of the inquiry to bring about a modern parental insurance system, attitudes and approaches need to change to ensure a more gender-equal labour market and more gender-equal parenting. Several actors in society must take responsibility for this development. Communication and dialogue will be an essential part of the inquiry's work.

Increased gender equality

Women take three quarters of parental benefit days – as many as four out of every five days during the child's first year of life – and around 60 per cent of temporary parental benefits. One in five fathers of children born in 2009 had not taken out a single day by the child's fourth birthday. Progress is moving too slowly. We also know that the division of parental benefits between parents differs depending on income, education levels, etc. This uneven division has major repercussions on income, labour market position and health. The gender pay gap is around 15 per cent, while the gender gap in pensions is as large as 30 per cent. Women carry out the majority of unpaid work in the home, work part-time more often, have poorer career development and take more sick leave. Two thirds of those on sick leave are women, and ill health accelerates while children are young, particularly after the second child is born. We also know that it is not just the time that parental benefits are taken out that is unbalanced; women also take more unpaid leave than men and are therefore absent from the labour market for a longer period of time.

Consequently, the inquiry has been tasked with proposing measures to achieve an equal division of parental benefits and parental leave, and in particular analysing the conditions for and consequences of more reserved months.

Confronting a modern labour market

Much has also happened in the labour market since the 1970s. More and more people have temporary employment of various kinds until increasingly later in life. More people are self-employed or combiners (people running a business parallel to their job), and on average they take less parental leave than people who are employed. Everyone must have equal opportunities to use parental insurance regardless of whether they have a permanent contract, a fixed-term contract or are self-employed. The inquiry's task is consequently to examine the challenges posed by working life on the possibility of taking parental leave, with particular focus on the conditions for entrepreneurs and students. The inquiry will also investigate the normative impact of the design of the parental insurance system, in society and in the labour market.

An insurance system for today's family constellations

Families can take many different forms, but when the parental insurance system was designed, it was still based on the idea of a nuclear family with two co-habiting parents. Today, we know that more than one in every five children grows up in another kind of family constellation. There are both nuclear families and non-nuclear families. There are permeable families and blended families, families with one parent and families with more than two parents. There can be a difference in having one or several children at the same time. The inquiry has therefore been tasked with investigating the possibility of making it easier for different family constellations to use the parental insurance system.

A clear insurance system that is simple to use

Parental insurance includes a number of different forms of insurance. The flexibility of the system offers an array of opportunities, and there have been various reasons for the changes made to it over the past 40 years. But for those wanting to use the system, it is not always easy to understand how it works or can best be used. The inquiry has therefore been tasked with analysing the need to simplify the system. The goal is that it should be easier to plan one's life and leave using parental benefits, and to identify the

situations in a child's life when parental insurance can make it easier to combine gender-equal parenting with work.

The common theme – the child's perspective

A common theme throughout is the child's perspective. The child's right to secure conditions to grow up in is central in designing family policy as a whole and the parental insurance system in particular. The principle of the best interests of the child must serve as a guide for the entire inquiry.

The politicians of 1974 were courageous, and we must be as well. We look at our society today and we want to make changes. We want to see a more gender-equal labour market and a more gender-equal private life, where there is also a more equal division of unpaid work. We want to see that children have equal rights to their parents, regardless of their position in the labour market or their family constellation.

If we see this – while also seeing that this is not the case today – then it is our responsibility to do what we can to make change happen. This is why the appointment of this inquiry is an important step. I am full of expectation ahead of the important task this inquiry will carry out and the proposals it will present.

/Minister for Social Security, Annika Strandhäll



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Ministry of Justice

Strengthen the right of LGBTQ people to be themselves

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Legislation must keep pace with developments in society. The Government therefore plans to implement changes that aim to offer the same conditions for everyone, regardless of their choice of partner and type of family, write five government ministers.

People have the right to be themselves in all areas of life. This includes the right to live with the person you love and to have your family formation treated with respect. Efforts to break old norms that limit people from fully living their lives must continue. This applies particularly to policies for the rights of those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ people).

Proactive organisations in civil society and courageous politicians before us have helped to move the situation of LGBTQ issues in the right direction. Society is constantly evolving, and perceptions of parenthood, family, gender and the rights of the child in the family evolve with it. Today, there are numerous family constellations other than the traditional nuclear families: single, friends with children, step-families or families with several mothers or fathers. Our social systems must also meet the needs of these families.

Legislation and its application must keep pace with developments in society. It must accommodate various ways of forming a family and ensure the right of all people to good health. The Government is therefore planning to implement changes that aim to offer the same conditions for everyone, regardless of the choice of partner and type of family that each of us chooses

to live with:

- Parental support and family law issues in social services need to be more modern, equitable and gender equal. Family constellations vary and have different needs. In light of this, the Government has concentrated responsibility for these issues at the Family Law and Parental Support Authority. An important task for the Authority is producing knowledge support for relevant actors so that these, in turn, can provide better support and guidance to parents and children.
- Families can take many different forms, but when the parental insurance system was designed, it was still based on the idea of a nuclear family with two co-habiting parents. The living conditions of families with children have changed over time.

More than one in five children grows up in a family constellation other than one including both their biological parents. The inquiry on parental insurance that is now to be conducted has therefore been tasked with identifying problems and investigating possibilities for facilitating the use of parental insurance by different family constellations.

- There are currently large health disparities between different groups in society. To close the avoidable health gaps within a generation, the Government has appointed a commission for equitable health. We know that LGBTQ people in general have poorer health and young LGBTQ people are particularly vulnerable with regard to mental health. In its work, the commission will therefore take into account health disparities between LGBTQ people and the rest of the population.
- The treatment of LGBTQ people in health and medical care is unequal across the country. Unfortunately, in their contacts with different authorities, individuals are sometimes doubted and treated ignorantly. This leads to LGBTQ people in some cases refraining from seeking care.

The National Board of Health and Welfare has been tasked with analysing care and treatment of intersex people (persons whose gender cannot be determined due to biological reasons) and implementing measures in the various areas of activity of social services. The objective is to raise awareness of LGBTQ people's living conditions and the various forms discrimination can take. The National Board of Health and Welfare and the Public Health Agency of Sweden will also review how issues concerning the health of young transgender people could be highlighted within the

framework of other mental health initiatives.

- There have been several high-profile cases where information was registered in the population registration regarding a person who had changed gender in such a way that the link between individuals, such as a child and a parent, was lost. The Swedish Tax Agency has now been tasked with describing what has been done or will be done to prevent problems that may arise.
- Current regulations regarding paternity and parenthood are based on heterosexual marriage. There is reason to review whether the regulations should be updated and for this reason, the Government intends to appoint an inquiry in the spring to conduct a review of the legislation.

These are some of the initiatives the Government is now implementing. We know there is a lot left to do. Discrimination, inequitable treatment and violence are still part of daily life for many LGBTQ people all around the country. This is never acceptable. The Government will continue its efforts to strengthen the possibility for LGBTQ people to fully be themselves in all areas of life.

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