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Hybrid masculinities and active fatherhood: a praxeological analysis of early parenthood in the context of social sustainability

28. Congress of the Austrian Sociological Association, Panel Social Sustainability in Family and Gender Relations, 1.7.2025, 1.30-3 pm

1. PL und CA in Austria

Maternity leave 16 weeks (since 1957/modified 1979), 8 weeks before and 8 weeks after birth, 100% income replacement (no upper limit), including health insurance	"Family time bonus" (previously "daddy month", 1 month) (introduced 03/2017, for employees), since 2024 around EUR 1626.26 per month, including health insurance
Parental leave 24 months—family entitlement (taken by one parent or by two parents on an alternating basis)	
Childcare allowance (CA) since 2002, moderate income; since 2017, "childcare allowance account"—flatrate and income-related variant	
Income-based childcare allowance (since 2010) 80% of the previous income, up to a maximum of EUR 2300 per month. max. 12 month/one parent income-based, max. 14 months/both parents, 2 months non-transferable, replacement, additional earnings may not exceed EUR 8100 a year.	Flat-rate childcare allowance account, differing in length (flexible, days)—overall sum of EUR 14.355 € for one parent or EUR 17.933 € for two parents over a chosen time span; one parent: around EUR 1200 per month in the shortest form (12 months), around EUR 515 in the longest form; two parents: around EUR 547 per parent/month (on an alternating basis), additional income limit EUR 18,000 per year.
All PL and CA variants, additional opportunities: partnership bonus EUR 1000 (EUR 500 per parent)	

Source: Included data retrieved from (**Schmidt et al. 2024a, pp. 73–78**).

2. Uptake of Parental Leave (PL) and Childcare Allowance (CA) in Austria

- **91% of the main recipients of the flat-rate childcare allowance are mothers, in 9% of cases fathers received childcare allowance in this form** (Schmidt et al. 2024, p. 83), in the income-dependent model fathers received childcare allowance in 28% of cases (ibid.).
- On average, fathers applied for childcare allowance in around 16% of all cases (Rille-Pfeiffer and Kapella, 2022), around 4.5% of all parental leave days in Austria (Austrian Court of Audit 2020).
- From a regional perspective, the proportion of male CA recipients is higher in Austrian cities and the metropolis of Vienna, especially in the income-dependent form;
- Parents prioritize the maximum amount / benefits payment – couple/family budget:
  this is also reported in an international context: calculations "at the kitchen table", "stretching" in flexible models (a.o. Arnalds, Eydal & Gíslason, 2023)
- The monthly income-related CA for parents is often higher over the entire entitlement period than in the flat-rate variants (36 months after the birth of a child) with a significantly lower benefit of €16.87 per day in the longest form (Schmidt et al. 2024, p. 76). - since 2025 €17.65/day.

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Hybrid masculinities - fathers in transition to parenthood

- Hybrid masculinities (Demetriou 2001; Bridges and Pascoe 2014, 2018) involve a (latent) continuation of hegemonic masculinity in a transformed form.
- While caring masculinities attempt to conceive of alternative masculinities that deviate from the previous hegemonic understanding, hybrid masculinities are orientated towards continuity and adaptability of hegemonic masculinity and current gender relations.
- This corresponds with the fact that male CA recipients in Austria mainly utilize CA for a maximum of 2-3 months. The majority of fathers in our sample work full-time after parental leave
- Other solutions are still not up for debate for many fathers and are not seen as an option (e.g. reduction in leave entitlements/ compensatory time, care days, part-time parental leave).
- Conversely: commuting, accepting a longer journey to work for a higher income; implementing flexible models (including the need for business trips)

Results: Fatherhood types I, II, III

Types of fatherhood	Motivation, decision	Goals, orientation
1. highly committed fatherhood, active **fatherhood as an obligation** (orientated towards motherhood; based on "measuring up"/competing -- an orientation traditionally associated with masculinity")	Parenthood for both **"right from the start"; clarity regarding the** division of childcare responsibilities; clear agreements (planning even before the birth of the child)	**Couple orientation** *(development towards caring masculinities)*
2. rationally argued fatherhood, **starting a family** as a **joint** (financial) **project**, family performance as an incentive, also as a basis for building a bond with the child/children)	Organising family leave, partnership bonus incentive; **parental leave/part-time work as an (interim) step in career planning.** (optional educational leave)	**Family orientation** *(financial / emotional rewards as a father -- hegemonic/hybrid M.)*
3. fatherhood based on equal opportunities (in income generation) (income of both parents as a right/ideal/necessity), **individual social security**	**Supporting the partner in earning an income, individual social security;** mutual financial support; (financial necessity for both parents to work).	**Orientation towards the individual** *("patriarchal dividend", Connell 2006; hybrid masculinities -- changing hegemonic concepts and remaining g. inequalities)*

Discussion:

Obstacles:

- Gender pay gap in Austria
- Social partnership between the sexes (Neyer 1997); establishment of part-time employment for women (Berghammer/Riederer 2019)
- Social norms on motherhood and fatherhood (Décieux et al. 2024; Mauerer 2025;Schmidt et al. 2019)

Supportive factors in Austria:

Gender-neutral KBG regulations.

? further supportive factors:

- Social benefits; 100% income replacement?/“top up” for women who return to work earlier/earlier? (AK re-entry monitoring; Riesenfelder/Danzer 2024).
- ? Political will? (& measures to reduce social norms on motherhood/fatherhood)
- Gender Equality Act - example Spain 2021

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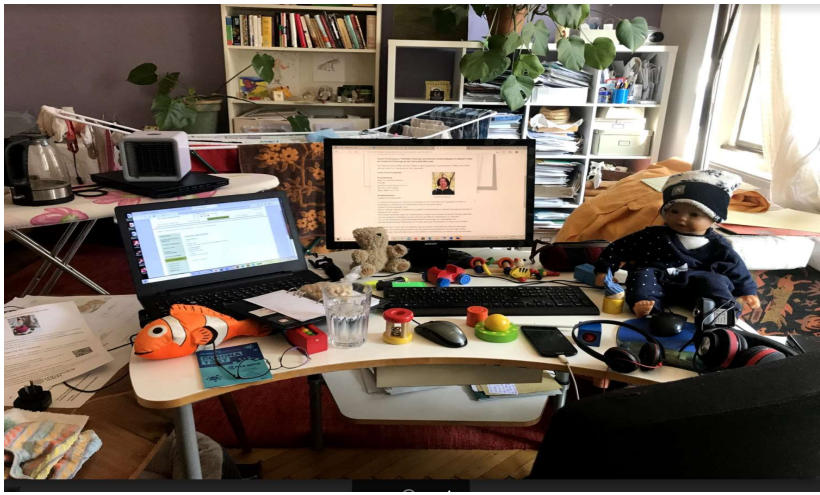
Gender and Family in Motion: Parental Arrangements

COST Action CA21150 – Sustainability@Leave
WG 2: https://sustainable-leave-policies.eu/working-groups/#wg2
Forthcoming Report on knowledge gaps in PPL and social inequalities research.



Picture Credit: Gerlinde Mauerer

Publications (Selection):

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Mauerer, Gerlinde (2025). Fatherhood Practices and Shared Parental Leave: Advancing Gender Equity in Parenting. Social Sciences, Social Sciences 14(5), 269. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14050269.

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