

# Parents' Dual Reconciliation of Gainful Employment and Childcare: Empirical evidence from Austria.



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# 1. Conceptual Framework: Gender and Family in Motion

## Gender Inequalities, Gender Relations

(Private and Public Sphere)

Hausen, 1976; Neyer, 1997; Acker, 2011.

**Norms of Motherhood and Femininity** (incl. Labor Legislation/ Parenthood),

**Fatherhood & Masculinities**

Elliott, 2016; Mauerer, 2019; Nimiistö et al., 2021

**National Family, Gender and Social Policies & EU legislation** (Promoting Women in the Workforce & Men's Parental Leave)  
Buber-Ennsner, 2015, Dearing, 2016; Marynissen et al., 2021; McKay et al. 2016



## Transition to Parenthood

O'Brien and Wall, 2017; Twamely, 2021; Faircloth, 2021; Moss et al, 2019; Schmidt, 2015, Mauerer and Schmidt, 2019

## Gender at Work

Acker, 1990, 2012; Petts et al., 2022.

**Care and Domestic Work** (Intersectional and Transnational Impact)

Tronto, 2013; Aulenbacher et al 2014, Aulenbacher & Wetterer, 2009; Mauerer 2006

**Transnational and global interdependencies**

(re-/producing and/or reducing social and gender inequalities & structural hierarchies)  
Acker, 2012; Chow, 2011, Walby, 2011, Aulenbacher & Wetterer 2009)

## 2. Parental Leave and Childcare Benefits in Austria

**Maternity leave 16 weeks** (since 1957/ modified 1979)  
8 weeks before birth, 8 weeks after 100% income

**Paternity leave labelled “Family time bonus“** (introd. 03/2017), 28-31 days. Moderate income replacement 23.91 € per day (since 01/2023)/ about 720 € per month

**Parental leave 24 months – family entitlement (taken by one parent only or on an alternating basis)** (since 1960 until 1999, first including allowances (12 months, later 18, finally 24 if fathers share, 6 months); since 2000 moderate income replacement through “Childcare benefits” (see below)

**Childcare Benefits:**  
**income-based form**  
12+2 months, 80% income replacement,  
(+2 months if parents share the leave),

**flat-rate forms, differing in length (flexible, days)**  
12+2 month, 1,000 € per month  
up to 35 months, 436 € per month

**in all forms, additional opportunity**  
partnership bonus 1,000 € postponing 3 months (until a child’s 7<sup>th</sup> birthday)

### 3. Uptake of Childcare Benefits in Austria

General patterns (Schmidt and Schmidt, 2022; Austrian Country Note, Parental Leave Network)

Length of childcare benefits uptake:

**35%** of all parents: **income-based model 12-14 months**

**25%** 24 or more months (flat rate)

**36%** 28 or more month (flat rate)

**89%** of principal recipients were mothers

Men's shares (Statistics Austria 2021, measuring leave days)

**30%** of income-based model 12-14 months (cases) are taken by men, but number of leave days taken by men is lower

**4.5%** men's shares of leave days (Rechnungshof 2020)

**5.84 %** men's shares of income-related childcare benefits form, in leave days

Traditional pathway/ changing societies – sharing the uptake (EU legislation)

*“(The) perception of providing parental care has been described as a process in which parents move back and forth along a continuum of gender relations, characterized by sameness, dichotomy, ambiguity, and inequality” (Oláh et al., 2017: 20).*

i.e., dual childcare benefits claims 12+2 months, + unpaid or educational leave.

### 3. Uptake of Childcare Benefits in Austria

#### Men's Shares in the Uptake of Childcare Benefits in 2017

2017	Old system 2017, birth 1.1.-28.2.		New system 2017, birth 1.3.-31.12.	
	Men's uptake %	Men's uptake in days	Men's uptake %	Men's uptake in days
Income-related childcare benefits	31.2	74	29.6	79
Flat-rate variant, account	14.2	151	11.4	193
Summary	18.8	116	17	132

Source: Verwaltungsdaten Kompetenzzentrum Kinderbetreuungsgeld; OIF, Lorenz and Wernhart, 2022: 10).



## 4. Research Background: Transition to Parenthood

**Empirical Research:** societal challenges in the realization of “new” parenting forms.

**Gender and Family in Motion. Parental arrangements (2021-2025): couple interviews with parents in Austria including parents in all 9 federal states in Austria, both parents have claimed childcare benefits for at least 5 months**

**Structural counterforces** : Austrian taxation system, labor market/ employment segments (lower net income for dual earners, single parents), female part-time work (Riederer and Berghammer 2019).

**Since 2003: new calculations in pension funds (40 years instead of 15), higher risk of financial and social insecurity in old age for parents**

**Family values, progressive attitudes, importance of gender justice, reducing gender inequalities** (OIF/ Lorenz and Wernhart 2022: Impact on parents’ choices in Austria)

## 5. Gender and Family in Motion. Parental Arrangements

FWF – Austrian Science Fund, 2021–2025, Department of Sociology, University of Vienna  
First empirical wave, 42 couple interviews, May 2021–May 2022, <https://genfam.univie.ac.at/en/>  
2023: two planned follow-up studies, individual interviews with parents

### Methods

- semi-structured guideline interviews with couples (Witzel 2010)
- MAXQDA-data-coding and analyses, content-oriented approach (Mayring 2015, Nentwich & Kelan 2014), Informed Grounded Theory (Thornberg 2012), including earlier information/results in the guideline structure and participation prerequisites (i.e., 5 months minimum length of childcare benefits claims)
- follow-up studies, next steps: individual interviews, theoretical sampling (Thornberg 2012; Thornberg & Charmaz 2021), theoretical sensitivity (Glaser 1978) – i.e., work context, no. of children, residence.

Limitations: no young parents (female interviewees 30-54a, male 32-52a); no same-sex parents included.



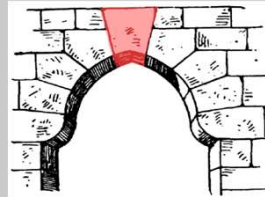
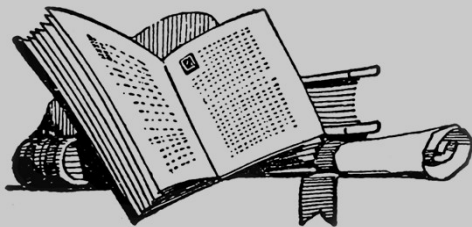


## 6. Early results: emergent themes (3 cases)

**C: 7 months/ 7 months  
May 2021**

**Anna, 37, civil servant,  
legislation law, Marcus, 34,  
also in legislation law,  
university lecturer**

**Nana, born in Mai 2020,  
attending a public childcare  
facility since Sept. 2022.**



**R: 9 months/ 5 months  
ZOOM October 2021**

**Nadja, 35a, tax advisor  
Karl, 37a, architect;**

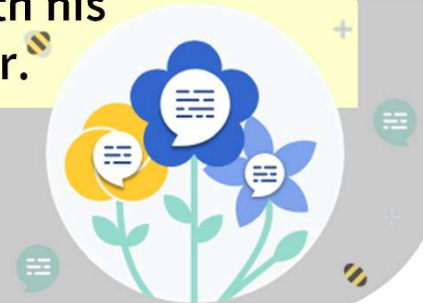
**2 sons, both 2 times on leave.  
Emo, born in July 2019, age 2  
years +3 months at the point of  
the interview (3 days per week  
in a private nursery since Sept.  
2020, half-day with his  
grandmother**

**Kai, born in May 2021 (leave  
shares 5-5-4 months)**

**CP2: 12 months/ 12 months  
ZOOM May 2022**

**Lisa, 38, self-employed  
entrepreneur, organic food  
store; Toni, 33, gardener;  
energy consultant)**

**Henri, 1.5 years old,  
attending daycare three  
(half) days/week; one day  
per week with his  
grandmother.**





## 6.1. Employment conditions, flexible arrangements

*I decided to go to work two weeks earlier than planned. And I knew, [...] if I don't come back, I will be immediately labelled and I will have to build it all up again.”*  
(R/Nadja, tax consultant, 35, 2 children)

*I am on parental leave for one year, until his second birthday in September. [...] And I've taken a further training course. [...] At the beginning of May, my employer hired me on a marginal basis, [...] four hours per week.*  
(P2/Toni, 33, gardener; energy consultant)

*I work for a small NGO that is extremely family-oriented, the boss has three children [...]. I talked to him in December [...] on the one hand, that I should take a lot of time off as an alternative daddy month.”* (C/Marcus, lawyer, 34, 1 child)

- Minor employment during parental leave
- Flexible agreements with employers
- Complexity of arrangements with partners



## 6.2. “A normal day on leave”, “an ideal day”

*Getting up with Nadja, he sleeps a bit longer, a quick shower, coffee, mostly when she was still there, that she takes him [...] I usually went out late in the morning, around 11 a.m., something like that, I had a fixed tour over the mountain for an hour. I prepared the food in the mixer with a mobile phone timer. [...] Karl 37, on leave with his first son, a normal day*

*Markus gets up at 6 a.m., and Nana and I sleep until 8 a.m.. Nana and me, we have breakfast, visit Markus in the home office [...] go for a big walk in the morning, [...] 2 hours in the fresh air [...] Cook, lunch together, usually around noon, 12:30. [...] we spend the afternoon at home, basically playing and, when Nana falls asleep again, because she was still sleeping quite a lot, [...] use the 2 hours (...) for things I would like to do. Anna, 37, a normal day*

*So, it would be ideal if he would already sleep through the night. [...] It would also be ideal if I could cook my lunch in peace. [...] For me, a good lunch is very important, a proper real meal. But chopping vegetables, roasting them, whatever, is difficult with him. [...] [And] I still have no social contacts in B., [...] I would be ideal to have social contacts in B. [small town in Austria]., [...] visiting someone quickly [...]. Lisa, 38, an ideal day*

## 6.2. Mental Load, “Family Management”

Right now, it's mostly 4 days a week when I take him over completely. And completely means we agreed that I take him over at 9 and then at 3 pm mostly, 3 or 4 pm Eva comes along. (2021, m/couple B, video production/ group of artists, 1 child)

Regarding domestic work, to be honest, I think regarding such things – things such as cleaning, what must be done regularly, to be honest, Lisa is more involved in doing such things. (2021, m/couple F2, IT/logistics, 2 children)

Okay, may I add something? Housekeeping, yes, what was there to be done, with the... he has to cook, for both of them. It worked pretty well. And other housekeeping things upon request. ... (IP2, the male interviewee, laughs). Yes, it's true! [she, the female interviewee, laughs]. When I said, you should do the laundry or you could vacuum again, well yes, it was done then, but otherwise ... [laughs]. (2021, f/couple O, PR/tourism, 1 child )

And then I would lay him down, he would sleep half an hour and that was my first break. (2021, m/couple H, scientific research, 1 child)

- “To be honest” – bringing a high demand down to earth (domestic work), “upon request”
- “Taking a break” – gendered responsibilities in childcare
- length of a normal day in parent's reports
- an ideal day on parental leave  
(men more often refer to a “normal day” as an “ideal day - “perfect as it is”)

## 6. Summary and Discussion

- Normal and ideal day on parental leave; work hours of female partners, markers for fathers' description of daily routines – men being on leave alone (Norman et al., 2016, 2014; O'Brien and Wall, 2017)
- Low impact of gender fluidity (prevalence of traditional family/ gender images in Austria, low impact of caring fatherhood in the past)
- Good opportunities for realizing father-child bonding in selected cases (mostly uptake of income-related child-care benefits, approx.  $\frac{3}{4}$  in our sample)
- Important prerequisite: parents' interest in realizing work-family-justice
- Dual parental childcare benefit claims: increased chances of further dual coordination, although not in all qualitative facets
- Parental leave policies focusing on early childhood, lack of structural support in social politics and economics (i.e. taxation of high income single earners, low impact of “undoing gender” at the company level)

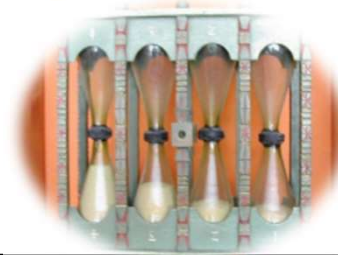


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# Thank you for your attention!

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## Recent Publications:

Mauerer Gerlinde (2022, in German): Eltern zwischen Erwerbstätigkeit und Fürsorge. Familiäre Kinderbetreuung und Karenz im Wandel . ÖIF Newsletter 11/2022, p. 1-4. <https://www.oif.ac.at/informationsdienst-beziehungsweise/2022/>.

Mauerer, Gerlinde (2021): Work-Life-Balance und geschlechterspezifische Vorannahmen am Arbeitsplatz. Ergebnisse aus der empirischen Forschung zu Elternkarenzen in Österreich. SWS, Heft 1/21, S. 43–62.

Magaraggia, Sveva; Mauerer, Gerlinde; Schmidbaur, Marianne (2019) (eds.): Feminist Perspectives on Teaching Masculinities: Learning Beyond Stereotypes, Teaching with Gender Series Volume 15, Routledge: London, New York.

Mauerer, Gerlinde (2019): Decision-Making in a Poster Competition on Caring Fathers in Austria: Gender Theoretical Reflections on Prize-winning Posters and Media Images. In: Magaraggia, Sveva/ Mauerer, Gerlinde/ Schmidbaur, Marianne (Eds.): Feminist Perspectives on Teaching Masculinities: Learning Beyond Stereotypes, Teaching with Gender Series Volume 14, Routledge, London, New York: 78-102. <https://www.routledge.com/Feminist-Perspectives-on-Teaching-Masculinities-Learning-Beyond-Stereotypes/Magaraggia-Mauerer-Schmidbaur/p/book/9780367193287>[06.05.2019].

Mauerer, Gerlinde; Schmidt, Eva-Maria (2019): Parents' Strategies in Dealing with Constructions of Gendered Responsibilities at Their Workplaces. Soc. Sci. 2019, 8, 250. <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0760/8/9/250>.

Mauerer, Gerlinde (2018): Both Parents Working: Challenges and Strains in Managing the Reconciliation of Career and Family Life in Dual-Career Families. Empirical Evidence from Austria. <http://www.mdpi.com/2076-0760/7/12/269/>. Mauerer, Gerlinde (2018): Paternal Leave and Part-Time Work in Austria: Rearranging Family Life In Arianna Santero, Rosy Musumeci (ed.) Fathers, Childcare and Work (Contemporary Perspectives in Family Research, Volume 12) Emerald Publishing Limited, pp.183– 207 <https://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/S1530-35352018000012008>