Understanding migrant integration under the lens of family policy use: Parental leave use among migrants in a couple perspective

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Short Abstract: The Swedish parental leave policy aims at facilitating the combination of work and caring for children by allowing for a temporary exit from the labor market with relatively high income compensation. Even though it is considered one of the most generous and flexible parental leave schemes in the world, the ability to use it efficiently depends on the parent's position in the labor market. Low maternal employment, early and high fertility as well as more gender-based division of paid and unpaid labor among couples from some migrant populations raise questions related to unequal parental leave uptake and how such uptake might have different consequences among groups with a migrant origin as compared to the non-migrant majority population. Understanding the division of parental leave among couples with different origin background is therefore central to understanding immigrant integration and implementing policies to promote integration. Our aim is to disentangle systematic variations in the use of parental leave that is related to very different labor market exits at childbirth for various groups of parents by migrant background. As the parental leave use of the mother and father are interdependent, we aim to model their use together with a couple perspective. We use the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (SSIA) data, a rarely used and unique administrative register data compilation including parental leave spells over period and specific to parent and child.

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Introduction:

The Swedish parental leave policy aims at facilitating the combination of work and caring for children by allowing for a temporary exit from the labor market with relatively high income compensation (Duvander and Andersson 2006). Even though it is considered one of the most generous and flexible parental leave schemes in the world, the ability to use it efficiently depends on an individual's position in the labor market (Mussino and Duvander 2016). Low maternal employment, early and high fertility as well as more gender-based division of paid and unpaid labor among couples among some migrant populations raise questions related to unequal parental leave uptake and how such uptake, might have different consequences among groups with a migrant origin as compared to the non-migrant majority population (Mussino et al 2023). For those struggling to access the labor market, parental leave could present unique challenges. When labor market integration is not realized before parenthood, the subsequent parental leave could lead to receiving benefits at a lower rate and potential challenges re-entering the workforce after an extended absence from the labor market. This can exacerbate an already disadvantaged situation. Conversely, the benefits for non-working parents might diminish the motivation, especially for women, to both enter and remain active within the labor market due to the attraction/appeal/incentive of these benefits (Vikman 2013, ISFl 2019). Understanding the division of parental leave among couples with different origin background is therefore central to understanding immigrant integration and implementing policies to promote integration (Mussino et al 2023).

This study examines Sweden, known for its strong gender equality in both the public and private sectors and a cohort total fertility rate (TFR) near the replacement level (Andersson et al. 2009; Jalovaara et al. 2019). Sweden presents an interesting case also due to the broad diversity of its migrant origins, which include countries with distinct fertility trends and varying degrees of gender

equality. The richness of the available data and the pronounced disparities in employment between international migrants and their descendants further emphasize its significance. The employment disparity between native Swedes and immigrants is among the most pronounced in developed countries, especially for women (OECD 2018). Refugees, family migrants, and female migrants face prolonged job-seeking durations and often land in low-skilled positions (Ruist 2018).

However, the construction of family policy in Sweden did not account for the potential systematic disparities in labor market outcomes between migrant women and natives (Sainsbury 2019, 2016). Consequently, the current family policy framework may impact immigrants' entitlements and social rights, leading to stratified utilization of such policies (Mussino and Duvander 2016). Additionally, immigrants come from heterogeneous origins where norms on parenthood, or readiness or awareness of the policy restrict full exploitation of the opportunities presented by the Swedish welfare state. The complexity of the system, is well known and immigrants are to large part dependent on information from the receiving civil servants (SNS 2022). Disparities in entitlements, information and norms on parenthood could manifest in varied parental leave patterns.

Our aim is to disentangle systematic variations in the use of parental leave that is related to very different labor market exits at childbirth for various groups of parents by migrant background. As the parental leave use of the mother and father are interdependent, we aim to model their use together with a couple perspective. Our goal is to answer the following questions: *What are the different patterns of parental leave (we are interested both in timing and type of benefit) for international migrants? To what extent can these patterns be explained by individual and couple characteristics such as earned income, education, migrant background?* To answer these questions we use the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (SSIA) data, a rarely used and unique administrative register data compilation including parental leave spells over period and specific to parent and child. We will focus, following a couple perspective, on all parents of children born in Sweden in 2015. We then follow these individuals for a period of 2 years from childbirth, to create parental leave spells based on a combination of possible states of parental leave uptake. We simplify our dataset through trajectory clustering, creating a typology of parental leave uptake trajectories based on their similarity. As our objective encompasses assessing the factors influencing the likelihood of specific parental leave uptake patterns and contrasting the prevalence of these patterns across varied couple typologies, we make use of regressions, designating the

theoretically derived trajectory types as the dependent variable. The results will lead to conclusions on different strategies of leave use in couples and how this is related to labor market positions of women and men of different backgrounds. We build on the few studies that have used Swedish parental leave data in spells (Eriksson, 2019, Duvander 2013, Viklund and Duvander 2017).

Parental leave uptake among migrants

Previous studies show lower uptake by migrant groups, in particular in context as Netherlands, Belgium or Spain, where eligibility criteria are related to labor force participation (e.g. Kil et al 2018). It should be noted that in many contexts the eligibility for recently arrived immigrants is quite restricted and rights are a patchwork not seldom falling back on maternalism even if the policy as such is gender neutral (Duvander and Koslowski 2022). In the Swedish context, where all individuals are eligible, migrant mothers do take parental leave but more intensively than natives due to the lower economic disposable and migrant fathers take less. One reason for this is that the well-known reserved parts of the leave, often called daddy months, have not been enforced for parents using the leave at the low flat rate. In a previous study (Mussino and Duvander 2016), we show that immigrant mothers use more parental leave the first year after their child's birth, but fewer days the second year of the child's life, compared to Swedish-born mothers. With time in Sweden and with an improved labor market position, immigrant mothers increasingly use the leave as Swedish-born mothers. A similar study on men (Mussino, Duvander and Ma 2018) also show that immigrant fathers do take parental leave, but not to the same extent as Swedish-born fathers do. And as expected the differences were mainly depending on the economic integration and the different degree of labor market attachment. In particular, the economic stability of both parents is important, which indicates that fathers outside the labor market often refrain from using parental leave. However, if the mother had high income, both Swedish-born and immigrant fathers use a longer leave, indicating similar couple negotiation over childcare and paid work in families with different backgrounds.

Using differences between Finland and Sweden as an instrument to decompose the roles of policy design and social norms in the differences in take-up rates between these two countries, Mussino et al (2018) showed the large effect played by the policy design to explain different parental leave

use among fathers. However, as mentioned before, a policy change could affect differently different segment of population.

Data and Methods

Swedish Social Insurance Agency (SSIA) data is a rarely used data collection including parental leave spells among other things. As the policy allows to mix paid and unpaid leave the spells of leave are crucial to understand the actual periods of exit from the labor market. Data come from the administrative registers and are prepared for use by researchers. We have acquired data from the SSIA, which include every parental leave claim each parent makes. This information comes directly from parents' claims on parental leave and is the most detailed information on parental leave usage available in Sweden. Parents are free to construct episodes of leave in any way they want and often five days of leave a week is combined with two unpaid days, giving a lower benefit but stretches the leave period. Episodes may consist of only 1 day and as little as an eighth of a working day (1 h). The leave data is thus defined by which day leave is used and for which child they are used. This is a great advantage to the data commonly used and provided by Statistics Sweden, which is aggregated by year and all children of the user. The data are cleaned and merged with other parental and child characteristics available at SSIA and provided by the Swedish statistical office (SCB), mainly income per year, personal characteristics of the parents (age, sex, country of origin, education, address and parity in Sweden), characteristics of the child (birth, sex, parents) as well as all social insurance use, including parental benefit and migration history.

We focus, following a couple perspective, on all parents of children born in Sweden in 2015 and we follow them for two years. Our main variables to construct the uptake pattern are *Parental leave episodes* and *related parental leave benefits* (both mother and father) and we apply Sequence analysis. Since Andrew Abbott introduced in the 1990s sequence analysis in the social sciences (see Abbott and Tsay 2000), it has increasingly been applied in life-course research, migration research, and in a few studies on family formation of immigrants (Caarls and de Valk 2017; di Belgiojoso and Terzera 2018; Kleinepier and De Valk 2016) and parental leave uptake (e.g Eriksson 2019). In sequence analysis, trajectories are represented as strings of characters (Billari 2005), with each character representing one particular state. Our observation starts one month before child's birth and follows 2 first years of child's life. States characterizing uptake of leaves

are defined for each of the 25 months. For every month, total numbers of leave days taken by each parent are calculated. Proportions of days compensated proportionally to parent's earlier income and those compensated according to the flat rate are also provided. Months are categorized according to proportions of mother's and father's days: "mother takes 75% of total leave days or more"; "father takes 75% of total leave days or more", "each parent takes between 25% and 75% of total leave days". Months with no leaves, months after birth of a sibling and months after emigration of one of the parents were treated as separate categories. We then reduce the complexity in our data by means of trajectory clustering, and that is done by building similarity-based trajectories in our dataset. Because our aim is also to estimate the determinants of being "at risk" of a certain parental leave pattern and compare prevalence of those patterns in different typology of couples, we apply multinomial logistic regressions using the theoretically motivated trajectory variable as the dependent variable. Variables were used which indicated countries of birth of both parents, their age, educational level, years spend in Sweden, income characteristics and marital status during the first years of child's life, sex of the child.

Selected population

The SSIA data contained overall 121,357 children born in 2015 for whom at least one leave spell was ever granted. As our study concentrated on distribution of leaves within couple of parents, we excluded those children for whom a non-parent (guardian) was ever granted a leave. This resulted in 699 excluded children. At the present step, the study dealt only with parental leave uptakes for couples that have only one child. For this reason, children were excluded who were not firstborns and/or had twins (overall 74,598 children excluded). Also, 4,015 children were excluded for whom we did not have any information of one of the two parents. This gave us the dataset of 42,045 children.

Figure 1 shows distribution of children included in the analysis between Swedish-born and non-Swedish-born parents.

Figure 1. Children by origin of parents
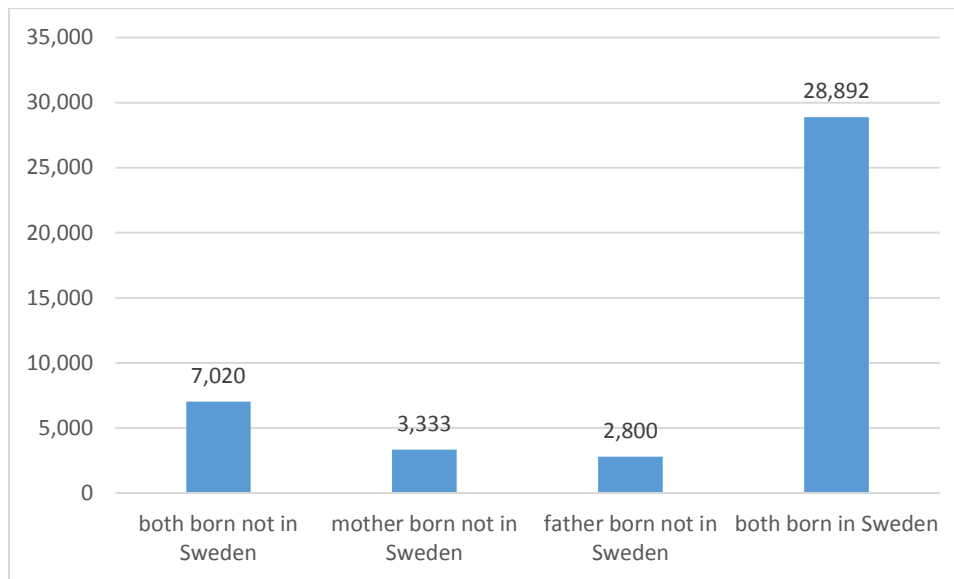
Results

Figure 2 shows clusters of couples trajectories in taking leaves from the month preceding the birth of the child up to the 24th month of child's life. The clusterisation shown here does not distinguish leaves for which compensation was calculated in accordance of the parent's earlier income and leaves compensated according to the "flat" rate. The following five clusters emerged from the analysis: (1) the "Swedish-standard" type, with fathers actively taking leaves after the child is approximately one year old; (2) the cluster with predominantly mothers taking leaves and high frequency of leaves till the child becomes approximately 1,5 years old; (3) the cluster with predominantly mothers taking leaves and most of leaves taken before the child is one year old; (4) the cluster with second child born before the firstborn is two years old; (5) the cluster with small number of leave days throughout the 2 years of the child's life ("postponed leaves").

Figure 2. Clusters of couples according to the distribution of leaves of both parents by months
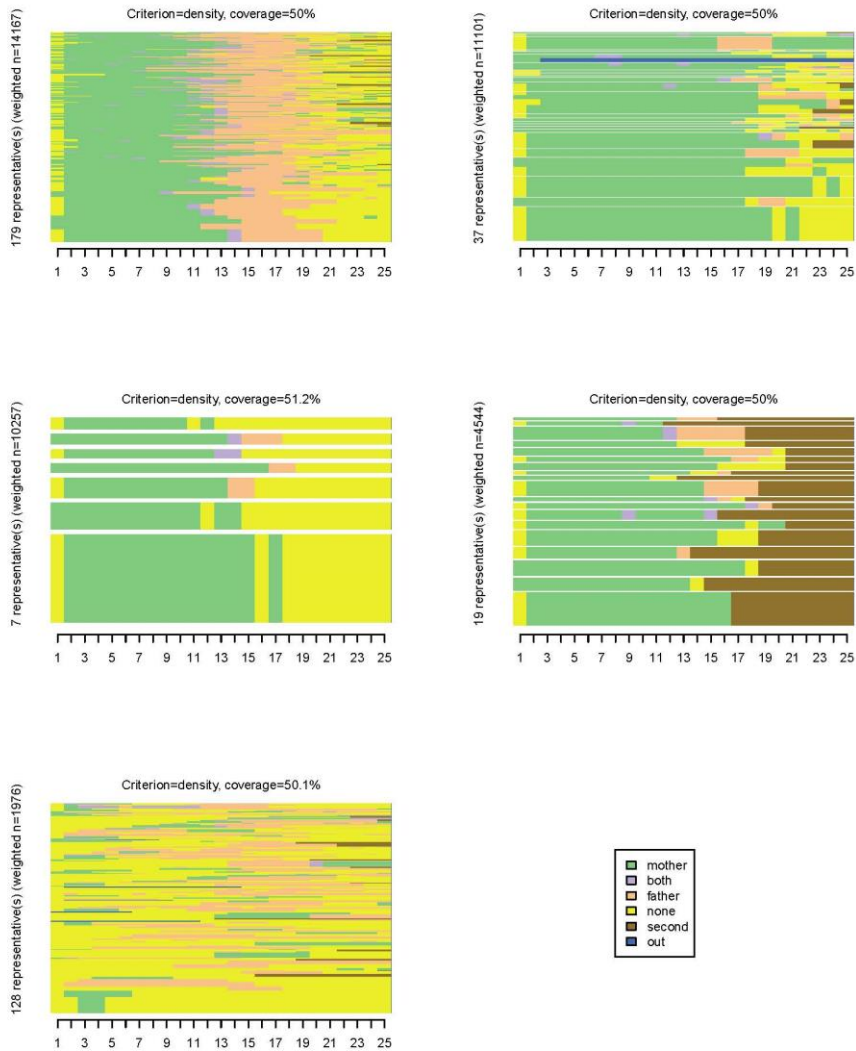

Figure 3 compares distribution of couples with native/non-native mothers and fathers between the clusters. Distribution of couples where both parents originate from one and the same country between the clusters is shown at Figure 4. Couples with migrant background of at least one parent occur in the cluster whether father actively take leaves less frequently than couples with parents born in Sweden (only migrants from other Nordic countries, Western Europe, North America and Australia pattern with native Swedes in this aspect). Another contrast between native and migrant

couples is that among migrant the proportion of those taking no or very few days of leave is considerably higher, what holds true for migrants both from developed and developing countries.

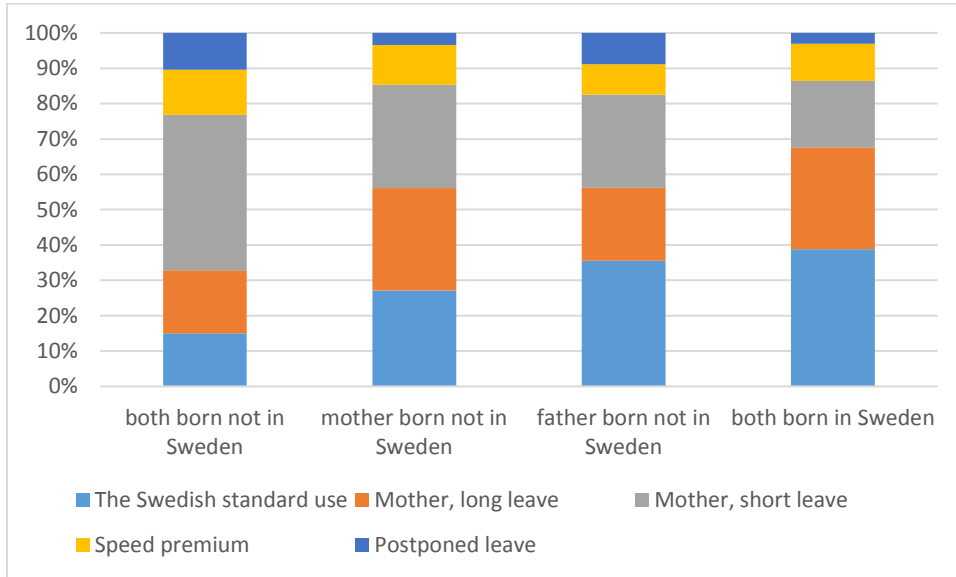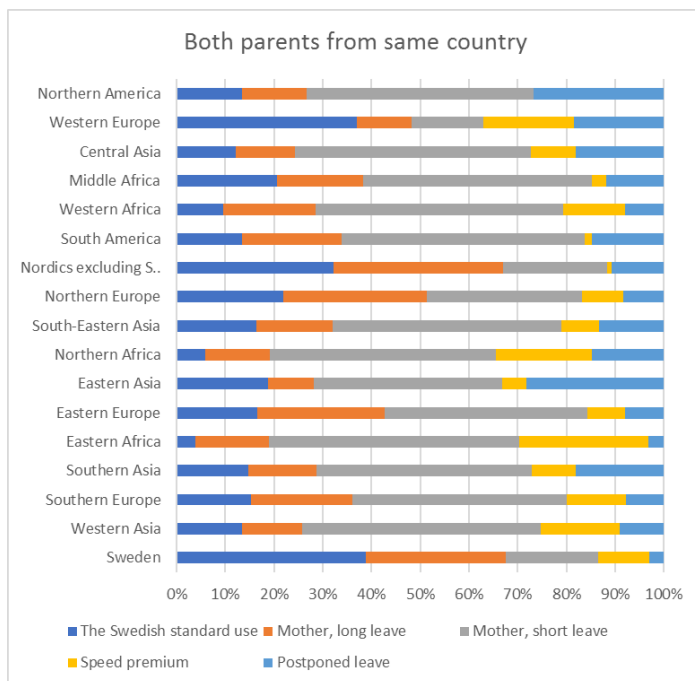**Figure 3. Distribution of couples between clusters, Swedish-born vs. migrant parents**

Figure 3. Distribution of couples between the clusters, by parents' regions of origin, only couples with both parents originating from the same country

Discussion

The topic of immigrant parental leave utilization holds significant policy implications and has already been spotlighted in Swedish political discussions (Duvander and Eklund 2006; Government Commission 2012; Vikman 2013; SNS 2021). Typically, income-related benefits coupled with job protection during leave act as motivators to merge labor market engagement with child-rearing. Yet, in the absence of successful labor market integration, this same policy could inadvertently lead to diminished benefits during parental leave and an exacerbated disadvantage upon returning from an extended labor market exit. Our initial findings indicate that migrants from various countries align differently to parental leave practices of the Swedish origin parents. Some immigrants groups face challenges harnessing the full advantages of the Swedish welfare framework, which in turn might shape their parental leave decisions. Such groups will have more difficulties accessing full information about the leave system and also will have a more difficult labour market situation. We also found a Swedish origin father is the key factor to follow a "Swedish standard use" model, while the origin of the mother is less crucial for leave patterns.

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