

This is changing, as countries are recognizing that men have both the desire and the obligation to be more involved at the critical early stage of the child's life and, more generally, more equally to share unpaid care and household work. Over time, the statutory provision of leave entitlements for fathers has increased. In 1994, statutory paternity leave provisions existed in 40 of the 141 countries for which data were available at the ILO. By 2015, leave entitlements for fathers were provided in at least 94 countries out of 170 for which data were available. In 2012, Mexico introduced a five-day paid paternity leave provision, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Equatorial Guinea granted three days' paid paternity leave and Bahrain one day of paid leave. Myanmar extended paternity leave from 6 to 15 days, paid at 70 per cent of previous earnings by social insurance. In 2013, the Islamic Republic of Iran introduced compulsory leave for fathers for a duration of two weeks and the Lao People's Democratic Republic leave for the birth of a child of three days. Uruguay extended paternity leave from 3 to 10 days, paid by social insurance. In 2014, Nicaragua moved to five days' paid paternity leave and in 2015, Paraguay extended the duration of paid paternity leave from 3 to 15 days. The same year, Portugal increased the duration of compulsory leave from 10 to 15 days, out of a total allocation of 20 days.

Those developments notwithstanding, assumptions which frame women as caregivers and men as breadwinners remain extraordinarily persistent, including in the workplace. A 2015 survey covering the 28 Member States of the European Union showed that, although changing men's and boys' attitudes towards care was identified as essential to reducing gender inequality in the labour market by 41 per cent of women and men respondents, 60 per cent still believed that the family was negatively affected (or "suffered") when mothers had full-time jobs. In addition, 66 per cent of Europeans disagreed that fathers should prioritize their careers over looking after their children. That said, however, 29 per cent still believed that fathers should prioritize their careers over caring for their young children (European Commission, 2015b). Consequently, while men may feel valued as workers, their paternity and care responsibilities are often ignored. Fathers perceive that, while family-friendly policies might in theory be available to parents in general, socialization, lack of take-up by other men and the absence of a supportive workplace result in these options being used only by women (Burnett et al., 2013). This represents a barrier to the more extensive use of leave and other work-family policies by men and hence poses an obstacle to gender equality.

As discussed in Chapter II, the imbalance in the take-ups of leave has a knock-on effect on the gender wage gap. For instance, in Sweden, for each month of parental leave that they take, women's earnings decrease on average by 4.5 per cent and men's by 7.5 per cent. By contrast, for each additional month that the father stays on parental leave, a mother's salary rises by 6.7 per cent (Johansson, 2010). The gender gap in the take-up of leave also negatively affects all women's wages – not only those of mothers – because of the consequences of discrimination (the "unexplained" wage gap; see Chapter II). Accordingly, leave measures should be designed with the explicit objective of transforming the gender-based division of unpaid household and care work, in line with the ILO Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156).

An increasing number of countries are encouraging more men to take advantage of parental leave (see box 15). Ensuring that all working men, including the self-employed, are legally entitled to paid leave or leave benefits is a first step. Then granting both parents time off for prenatal and postnatal health care visits, as provided in France and Portugal, is a way to ensure men's early involvement. Moreover, by making leave entitlements compulsory and non-transferable, and by providing cash benefits linked to previous earnings which are paid by social insurance or public funds, the right incentives are created for more active participation. Research in 21 European countries based on available data on the take-up rates of parental leave shows that women usually take all the available highly paid leave (including the transferable share), while their take-up of low-paid or unpaid parental leave depends on two factors: the availability of affordable childcare services or men's assumption of care responsibilities during the first months after childbirth. On the other side, most men take their leave only when it is both non-transferable and fully – or nearly fully – paid (close to 100 per cent of previous earnings). The study concludes that men's balanced participation in caregiving (at 50 per cent) can only be promoted through equal duration, non-transferability and a high income replacement of parental leave (Castro-García and Pazos-Moran, 2015).